

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES
REGARDING POVERTY BASED PROGRAMS IN WHICH THEIR
CHILDREN PARTICIPATE

by

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ABSTRACT

Research informs us that parental involvement and support enhances student academic achievement. Title I guidelines require parental participation in planning programs. The need to gain parental perspectives has become a challenge for school administrators and teachers. This research serves the goal of gaining parental participation and collecting the perceptions of parents whose children participate in federal sponsored programs such as Title I, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Collaboration with a social service agency, offering services to parents in a specified region, was key to meeting the goals of this project. The collaboration fostered a connection with a social worker that could provide recruitment strategies and facilitate the focus groups in that she already had an existing relationship with parents whose children received services from federal school related programs.

Results from the focus group interviews have provided feedback on how programs are viewed by clients and how school administrators can improve those programs.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My Wife: Dr. Lisa M. Shoaf

Your countless sacrifices allowed me to complete this research and achieve a personal goal. You showed unconditional love and support for our son and me, as I was absent many times from my parenting responsibilities while working on this dissertation. I cherish our relationship and trust. Thank you.

My Son: Michael J. Shoaf

Although you are much too young to realize the personal significance of this work and the time I missed with you. I hope someday that you will find an educational area that interests you with the passion and commitment that this dissertation has for me.

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Thank you for the values that you have instilled within me and for your support. I admire your strength and hope that I can care and provide for my family as you have for ours. Thank you.

My Brother: Dr. Joseph M. Shoaf

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My Friend: Matthew J. Scott

Matt, my brother-in-law, died January 9, 2003. Matt was my friend and I miss him.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In way of introduction I would like to review a brief history of the federal government's involvement in public education. I will call special attention to the government's involvement in poverty-based programs and I will note the negative impact of poverty on students' academic achievement. Although the federal government does not claim to be responsible for funding education for the citizenry, the allocation of federal money for educational purposes allows for significant bureaucratic influence through poverty-based program guidelines and assurances. Federal grant allocations such as Title I attempt to create equity by funding educational services designed to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers.

As the federal grants director for a public school system I have an interest in parental perspectives concerning the value of federally funded programs. I want to know if parents value current federal programs that are administered to help children succeed academically. In this study perspectives were sought from parents with children participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The research methodology used was focus group interviews. The interviews sought to gain parental perspectives concerning the value of poverty-based programs for their children and themselves. The interviews queried parents to share their perspectives on how targeted programs such as Title I, NSLP, School Breakfast Program (SBP), and other federally funded programs academically help children and parents. A social worker serving as the moderator for the interviews sought perspectives concerning the value of programs or the need for alternate or new programs.

Brief History of Federal Involvement in Education

The federal government of the United States is not primarily responsible for the education of the citizenry. “In colonial America the providers of elementary education at first were the parents; but gradually their role was supplemented and then largely replaced by local school districts” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 187). Legislative leaders largely influenced the emergence of local school districts following the Civil War.

In the late 18th century, Congress encouraged the establishment of schools by setting aside land for their support – in fact, a vast amount of land, 77 million acres. After the Civil War, Congress demanded that all new states admitted to the union provide free, nonsectarian public schools. (Jennings, 2000, p. 1)

Since the 18th century legislatures have been active, mainly in a supportive role, of public education. Public officials offered fiscal support for common schools to teach the principles of democracy, foster the economy with job training opportunities, and assure national defense by providing educational training for the citizenry.

During the 20th century, the federal government encouraged general support of schools and colleges by allowing federal income tax deductions, promoting vocational education to train workers, enacting the GI Bill of Rights, and by passing the National Defense Education Act to support science and mathematics instruction. (Jennings, 2000, Federal Aid Before Title I section, ¶ 1)

The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* stated that segregated schools were unconstitutional. As a result of the ruling, great debate arose over the “quality of education being provided to African American children. Eventually these debates led to a broader discussion of the needs of all children of all races who

came from poor families or who had discernable disadvantages” (Jennings, 2000, p. 1). Resulting from the concerns, the initial stages of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) took shape under President John F. Kennedy.

ESEA had the noble objective of closing the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged children. It was going to do that by directing billions of federal dollars in a dazzling array of special programs focused especially on the children of poverty. (Holland, 1999, Where We Are section, ¶ 1)

Kennedy and eventually Lyndon B. Johnson faced three main challenges when implementing ESEA legislation.

Southerners feared that, if schools received new federal aid for education, it would lead to forced integration of white and black students. Second, conservatives said that new federal aid would lead to federal control of elementary and secondary education. Third, proponents of Catholic schools and other private schools blocked any new legislation that did not involve some aid to their schools. (Jennings, 2000, p. 2)

Lyndon Johnson became President of the United States following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. Johnson won the presidential election in 1964 and was able to make great strides in civil rights laws as well as combating the three noted challenges to ESEA.

The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed the issue that was brought forth by Southerners concerning integration of schools. The Civil Rights Act barred discrimination by all institutions. Subsequently, if local boards of education were to

accept federal resources for schools, they were required by law to follow the mandates of the Civil Rights Act.

Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act, President Johnson worked to address the issue of federal influence over schools and how fiscal resources would impact private education. Vinovskis (1999) stated many people “welcomed the addition of federal education dollars and guidelines” (p. 188) but others, “objected to the intrusion of federal regulations and experts into an area historically reserved for parents and local school boards” (p. 188).

John Gardner chaired the commission on education that was ordered by Johnson in 1964.

The commission suggested tying education aid to the new War on Poverty, which had been launched in the previous year. Johnson adopted this approach, and the ESEA proposed Title I as a program of aid to disadvantaged children, along with other “categorical” programs for the purchase of library books, the creation of supplemental education centers, and the development of state departments of education. (Jennings, 2000, p. 2)

Title I funds were provided to support academic programs for disadvantaged students with an emphasis in the core subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. Among the provisions of Title I were requirements that school administrators needed to involve parents (Struck & Vail, 1999). Parental involvement was required in the 1965 legislation.

The law’s parent provisions were mainly focused on involving parents in the governance of the program, through such mechanisms as parent advisory councils

or PACs. These served to ensure that parents' voices were heard when schools devised Title I programs, and also acted as an outside check to ensure fiscal and program accountability. (Struck & Vail, 1999, Evolution section, ¶ 1)

Federal dollars were provided, through schools, to disadvantaged children rather than to private institutions or parents. Public schools were provided federal dollars to develop programs to help disadvantaged children succeed academically. Private schools received federal allocations through public school administrators as required by law. Thus, public school administrators became responsible for allocating funds to private schools for the purpose of educating disadvantaged students. Private schools today continue to utilize ESEA funds for disadvantaged children to "support no fewer than five dozen major programs extending into virtually every area of school life" (Holland, 1999, Where We Are section, ¶ 1).

ESEA has continued to grow in terms of fiscal allocations since 1965. Initially, \$1 billion was allocated to schools to help disadvantaged children succeed academically.

This was the beginning of Head Start (a preschool program for disadvantaged children aiming at equalizing equality of opportunity based on "readiness" for the first grade), Follow-Through (to complement the gains made by children who participated in the Head Start Program), Bilingual Education (targeted mainly Spanish-speaking children), and a variety of guidance and counseling programs.

(Schugurensky, 2002, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

President George W. Bush has recommended significant allocations for national support of education (see Table 1). "President Bush's budget request for 2004 provides \$53.1 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, an increase of \$2.8 billion or 5.6 percent

above his 2003 spending plan and the largest dollar increase of any domestic agency” (Bradshaw & Langan, 2003, Largest Dollar Increase of Any Domestic Agency section, ¶

1). Furthermore Bradshaw and Langan reported,

The 2004 request, together with his (President Bush) 2003 budget, builds on the substantial federal investment in education during the last six years with discretionary appropriations rising from \$23 billion in fiscal year 1996 to \$49.9 billion in fiscal year 2002 – a growth of 117 percent. (Largest Dollar Increase of Any Domestic Agency section, ¶ 2)

Table 1

ED Discretionary Appropriations

Year	Billions of Dollars
2004	\$53.1
2003	\$50.3
2002	\$49.9
2001	\$42.2
2000	\$35.6
1999	\$33.5
1998	\$29.9
1997	\$26.6
1996	\$23.0

Note. 2003 and 2004 reflect President’s request levels

(U.S. Department of Education, 2003b, Summary of the 2004 budget section, ¶ 5).

Robelen (2003) stated, “Overall, the fiscal 2003 spending bill contains about \$24 billion for programs authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (Splitting the Difference section, ¶ 11). The 2004 budget proposal provides

\$12.4 billion for Title Grants to Local Education Agencies, an increase of \$1 billion or 9 percent over the 2003 request, to give States and school districts additional resources to turn around low-performing schools, ensure that no child is trapped in such a school, and improve teacher quality. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003c, Implementing No Child Left Behind, ¶ 1)

Title I has been expanded to provide schools with multiple options for service implementation. The U.S. Department of Education (2003a) reported in Title I guidelines that a single teacher may instruct students in small group settings or local boards of education may implement schoolwide programs. Schoolwide programs may be implemented if “40 percent” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a, Section 1114 Schoolwide Programs section, ¶ 1) or more of the students are from low-income families. Low-income is often determined by the number of students that are eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Schoolwide programs typically increase faculty numbers to create smaller student-teacher ratios for all children.

Associated with Title I, political leaders provide significant funding to foster education in specific areas. “A special concern of the federal government for more than three decades has been the education of children who come to school with disadvantages—be they educational, economic, physical, or mental” (Jennings, 2000, p. 516). ESEA has served as the means for providing fiscal resources to states for educational services that may not receive funding due to local budget restraints. The federal government with stringent guidelines and assurances, pledges ESEA resources to help close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged children and their peers.

Poverty Negatively Impacts Education

Legislators recognize poverty as a disabling factor in education. The number of children living in poverty is alarming for society and educators alike. The Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University, reports that hunger has a negative effect on a “child’s health, academic achievement, psychological health, and behavior” (Center on Hunger and Poverty, 2002). The negative impact that poverty has on education and social adjustment must be understood so that federal, state, and local resources can be used to provide services to elevate children and their families from conditions related to living in poverty.

Furthermore, educators and political leaders cannot regard poverty as a temporary state or a societal problem that once family or individual income exceeds the poverty line, all adverse effects are left behind. Rather, a correlation can be drawn between the length of time a family lives in poverty and the impact poverty has on the educational development of a child.

A comprehensive review of the relationship between parental income and school attainment, published in 1994, concluded that poverty limited school achievement while the effect of income on the number of school years completed was small. In general, the studies suggested that a 10% increase in family income is associated with 0.2% to 2% increase in the number of school years completed. (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, pp. 61-62)

The impact of living in poverty conditions or within a close range to the poverty threshold has a great influence on educational readiness and student achievement.

Much of the observed relationship between income and schooling appears to be related to a number of confounding factors such as parental education, family structure, and neighborhood characteristics. For low-income children, a \$10,000 increase in mean family income between birth and age 5 was associated with nearly a full-year increase in completed schooling. (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 62)

The depth of poverty conditions may vary between families, but the impact on education is universally negative. Research indicates that poverty exists in all communities and schools. Olson (2000) reported the ethnicity of children living in poverty is changing.

Today, black and Latino children are far more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic white children. And by 2015, African-American and Latino youngsters are projected to make up 60 percent of the children in low-income families, up from 47 percent in 1990, according to a recent report by the New York City – based College Board. The same study found that while one in five children raised in poor families had immigrant parents in 1990, one third of children raised in poor families are projected to have immigrant parents in 2015. But poverty is just not an urban or minority phenomenon. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, of the 5.2 million children under age 6 living in poverty in 1997, 60 percent lived outside urban areas, including 37 percent in the suburbs and 23 percent in rural communities. Moreover, the percentage of young children living in poverty is growing much faster in the suburbs than in either urban or rural communities. (Olson, 2000, Introductory section, ¶ 8 and 9)

Schools across the country have children that are living in poverty.

School-age children and adolescents are particularly sensitive to peer perceptions, the attitudes of school personnel from secretaries to teachers to principals frequently mirror the negative discourse of the media, congressional welfare rhetoric, and the public at large, all of which constructs poor families as mired in their own behavioral pathologies-where poverty and homelessness become one's personal responsibility. (Books, 1998, p. 15)

The neglect or inability of educators to help children living in poverty or those that have lived in poverty will only continue to impact negatively the educational process.

Problem Statement

Title I mandates parental involvement and research informs us that parental participation enhances student achievement. We need to gain parental perspectives in order to know how, and if, parents perceive poverty-based programs such as Title I, NSLP, SBP, and the like to be helping their children succeed academically. As the administrator for Title I in my district I have not felt successful in gaining parental input concerning federal program. I have had difficulty getting participants to offer their perspectives on the value of federal programs. I do not have an existing relationship with parents that are willing to discuss the program. I have been frustrated in my efforts to gain parent involvement. My inability to gain parental input is not unique, my administrative peers echo a similar frustration.

Coupled with the need to gain parental perspectives concerning the general value of poverty programs designed to help children academically is our failure to differentiate needs of particular families and circumstances of poverty. There is a need to identify and

hear from parents that are demographically identified as either generationally urban poor, generationally rural poor, situationally urban poor, or situationally rural poor.

Parents, with children living in poverty, need to be given the opportunity to address the success and value of existing poverty programs. Parental perspectives need to be queried to determine if programs support children academically and socially and to discover if these programs are seen as aiding parents to help their children with academic achievement. This study provides participants the opportunity to offer perspectives on how programs are impacting the educational and social attainment of their children and how programs helped these parents assist their children. The information gained from parents with children participating in poverty-based school programs may serve as a decision-making foundation for school and social service administrators regarding existing programs and the development of new and more carefully targeted programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to try and find a means to generate parental perspectives on the value of poverty-based programs and on how these programs contribute to academic success for their children. In looking for a means to gain participants for this study, I decided to try to collaborate with a social service agency that also works with these parents. The collaboration with the social service agency has allowed me to develop a relationship with a social worker that already had an existing relationship with parents. Utilizing the social worker as the moderator for the interviews allowed the participants that already knew her, to engage in a more open dialogue during the interviews. This arrangement allows me to gain parental feedback so as to gather perspectives regarding the value of existing programs and to inquire how parents believe

programs can be altered or new programs created to help their children succeed academically.

The impact of poverty cannot be as effectively addressed or combated if educators are not knowledgeable of the needs and expectations of parents with children living in poverty conditions. Educators need to evaluate the value of existing poverty-based programs as well as possess knowledge to adjust current programs or, if necessary, develop new programs that will academically serve children and their parents that are living in poverty.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored through this study:

1. Can a joint effort with a social service agency serve to provide the desired opportunity to hear the views of parents with children participating in poverty-based programs?
2. Will circumstances of poverty yield diverse viewpoints and distinguish needs by conditions of poverty?
3. Do parents want their children to participate in poverty-based programs?
4. Which, if any, of their children's needs do they see being met by federal and state poverty programs? How?
5. Which, if any, of their own parenting needs do they see being met by current federal and state poverty programs?
6. Do they believe that poverty-based programs in which their children are participating are supportive of an increase in their student's academic achievement?

7. Do they observe any particular changes to current programs that need to be made in order to help their children or help themselves assist their children? If yes, what are those changes and how would they improve their child's school performance?
8. Are there additional programs that they perceive should be offered to their children to aid in improving their success at school?

Methodology

The methodology for this study is focus group interviews conducted by a social worker that has an already established rapport with parents of children participating in poverty-based programs. Furthermore, collaboration between the moderator and myself allowed for the development of questions with appropriate language and tone for interview participants. The meetings with the moderator also yielded an opportunity to clarify the intention of this study and the development of a shared vision for the research project. This collaboration in addition to bolstering a communication across institutions has sought to improve the lives of these clients living in conditions of poverty in northeast Ohio.

Focus group interviews are an appropriate research method for this study because they are recognized as a means to gain perspectives on specific topics.

Researchers in both marketing and the social science fields agree that the focus group interview is an extremely flexible methodology that can be used in a variety of settings to achieve many purposes. The focus group interview can be used at any point in a study, and focus group research can stand on its own as a methodology. (Shoaf, 2000, p. 50)

Focus group interviews are “a socially oriented research procedure” (Krueger, 1994, p. 34) that provides data with high validity. The sample size for focus group interviews is larger than typical qualitative research and the results are immediate. The interaction among group members and the probing by the moderator can provide rich data that may be lost in surveys or personal interviews.

Additionally, the moderator for focus group interviews is very important. The preliminary meetings between the researcher and the moderator served to develop a clear understanding of the research purpose. The moderator leads the focus groups during the actual interview and can offer great expertise to question specification before and during the interviews. “The best interviews appear to be seamless, spontaneous, and inevitable” (Farley, 1994, p. 25). In this study, I elected to have the moderator act in the place of the researcher during the focus group interviews.

Although focus group interviews are an effective means for gaining parental perspectives limitations do exist. Shamdasani and Stewart (1990) have identified limitations for the focus group interview methodology. Such limitations include bias, intended or not, that may result from a moderator. Thus, I discussed with the moderator the importance of being as impartial as possible during the interview process. Furthermore, I have recognized that focus group participants in this study may not be representative of the population that is being sought in that people that are willing to give their time and drive to a specific location for an interview may not be typical of the entire group of parents with children participating in poverty-based programs. The participants for this study were provided a lunch during the interview and offered transportation to and from the sessions by the moderator. Additionally, the interview sessions were

scheduled during the typical group meeting time with the social worker or at other convenient times for the participants. Shamdasani and Stewart (1990) warned that focus group participants are not independently surveyed for their responses and one member of the group may dominate the interview process. In an effort to address this limitation I included in the training with the moderator the importance of making a conscious effort to gain perspectives from all participants.

Although the identified limitations were not exhaustive, the potential for skewed data did exist. I have tried through the methodological process implemented during this study to account for the possible shortcoming of focus group research. Such precautions included pre-interview meetings between the researcher and moderator to discuss interview procedures, the development of specific interview questions (see Appendix F) that allowed the moderator to probe participants for perspectives that were appropriate for the study, and the identification of a sample that was representative of the population being sought for group interviews.

Significance of the Study

This study explores the means and a method to gain perspectives of parents regarding federal programs designed to assist their children academically. In addition I have sought to identify and invite parents from 4 different perspectives of poverty. Parents identified as generational urban, generational rural, situational urban, and situational rural poor participated in the interviews. In seeking representatives from the 4 demographic groups I hoped to gain some sense of their views on and of the need for targeted poverty-based programs.

Rebecca Blank, author of *It Takes a Nation*, stated, “every day, Americans slip in and out of poverty” (Smart Library, n.d., Who Becomes Poor and For How Long section, ¶ 1) because a family member is lost or a major loss in income has occurred.

Subsequently, educators today are faced with numerous challenges that are a result of children and their families living in poverty conditions.

When someone grows up in the culture of poverty, often their attitudes are different from people living outside of poverty. Acceptable dress, behavior and ways of dealing with conflict differ in poverty, middle class and wealth. The problem with poverty is much more complex than the distribution of material resources or employment opportunities. (Lind, 2002, p. 1)

Thus the perspectives of parents with children participating in poverty-based programs may lead to several findings. First, current school and social service programs were discussed with focus group participants to determine if they are inclined to permit their children to participate in established programs. Many times local and federal programs are developed in schools for a specific student population. But, as the population changes and needs become different, programs are not always altered. Or perhaps even more troubling are programs that take several years to be fully implemented only to have the children for whom they were designed no longer in the district or to find that funding has been reduced or eliminated as political leaders change. As poverty-based programs are offered by federal, state, and local governments, it is important to gain parents’ perspectives on existing programs as well as to anticipate programs that may be needed for their children.

Parents were asked if they felt existing programs were of service to them in meeting the academic needs of their children. Federal poverty programs are based on generalizations that are made from national data and targeted for improving academic opportunities. Programs administered at the local level may or may not be helping children because community needs may be different than the national norms.

Parents were asked to discuss how local agency and federal poverty programs impact their children and themselves. Both local agency and federal programs were addressed to determine if programs are offered in a timely manner and if programs based on national data seem to be designed to help these parents and their children.

This research project sought parental perspectives on the value of existing poverty-based programs. Parents were asked to discuss the value of existing programs and to speculate on new programs they believe need to be developed to help their children succeed academically. Coupled with the benefit of programs for children, interview participants were asked to offer their views on how current programs help parents and to speculate on the development of new programs that will assist parents with their children. The question of program value as related to parents and their children was explored through this local perspective.

Definitions

Poverty Program-For the purpose of this research, poverty has been defined through the following federal guidelines for free or reduced priced meals or free milk eligibility. If a child qualifies for a free or reduced lunch his or her parent(s) is eligible to participate in the focus group interview (see Table 2).

Table 2

Income Eligibility Scale for Free or Reduced- Price Meals or Free Milk- Effective for the 2002-2003 School Year

Household Size: Parents, Children, and Other Household Members	Income Eligibility Scale for Free Meals or Free Milk		Income Eligibility Scale For Reduced-Priced Meals	
	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Annually
1	\$ 960.00	\$11,518.00	\$1366.00	\$16,391.00
2	\$1,294.00	\$15,522.00	\$1,841.00	\$22,089.00
3	\$1,628.00	\$19,526.00	\$2,316.00	\$27,787.00
4	\$1,961.00	\$23,530.00	\$2,791.00	\$33,485.00
5	\$2,295.00	\$27,534.00	\$3,266.00	\$29,183.00
6	\$2,629.00	\$31,238.00	\$3,741.00	\$44,881.00
7	\$2,962.00	\$35,542.00	\$4,215.00	\$50,579.00
8	\$3,296.00	\$39,546.00	\$4,690.00	\$56,277.00
For each additional family Member, add	\$ 334.00	\$ 4,004.00	\$ 475.00	\$ 5,698.00

Note. To receive free or reduced-priced meals or free milk, the total household income applicable to household size must be equal to or less than that indicated in column B for free meals or, at local option, free milk. To qualify for reduced-priced meals, the

household income must be equal to or less than that indicated in column C and greater than that in column B for the applicable household size. (Income Eligibility Scale, 2002-2003, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

Child/Student-A person between the ages of five (5) and twenty-one (21) who attends school and participates in a poverty-based program.

Parent/Guardian-The person that is legally responsible to provide care and safety for the child.

Public School-The political entity that is governed by an elected board of education and is held responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education.

Generational Poverty-Family or individuals being in poverty in two generations or longer.

Situational Poverty-This circumstance of poverty is temporary, typically the result of a lost job or death of a family member that contributed money.

Urban Area-Areas identified as a city typically with 1,000 residents or more per one square mile.

Rural Area-Areas outside of city limits with a population less than 1,000 residents per one square mile.

This study has been limited by

I knew at the onset that this study would be limited by:

1. The effectiveness of the researcher's ability to gather data through focus group interviews.
2. The researcher's ability to present findings from focus group interviews.
3. The ability of one selected moderator to conduct focus group interviews.

4. The ability of the researcher and focus group moderator to clarify with each other and share a vision of the research project.
5. The perspectives and experiences of the selected participants.
6. The demographics of the participants.
7. The poverty programs that have been experienced by the participants or their children.

This study has been limited to

I choose to limit this study to:

1. Participants in one geographic area in northeast Ohio from the counties of Ashtabula, Geauga, and Lake.
2. A purposive sample from a social service agency.
3. Those poverty programs that were known by the participants.
4. Selected participants' perspectives about the poverty-based programs.
5. A purposive sample from northeast Ohio, which may prevent the results from being generalized to other groups of samples.

Although no one factor was more significant than another, the limitations for this study are worthy of explanation. The ability of the researcher to gather data through focus group interviews was a limitation of this research. Richard Krueger (1994) stated, "the researcher has less control in the group interviews as compared to the individual interviews" (p. 36). Focus group interview procedures allow for discussion to build among participants and to include off topic discussion and information that may not be relevant to the research. On the other hand, such off topic discussion could point to information or new questions that the researcher had not considered. The ability of the

researcher to develop content specific questions and to disseminate information through participant responses was significant for focus group findings.

Coupled with the inherent limitations within the methodology, the presentation of the findings was problematic for this study. Particular attention needed to be provided by the researcher to report participant responses in proper context. Supplementary discussion occurred during focus group interviews, thus, segments of the responses were not relevant to the findings. The researcher reviewed transcript data and conversed with the moderator to ensure that findings accurately represented the intent of the participants.

Furthermore, a significant element of focus group research involves the ability of the moderator to ask probing questions. “It is generally recognized throughout the research industry that the most important element in the focus group process is the moderator” (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 63). Shamdasani and Stewart (1990) state,

An important first question is whether moderators should be selected on the basis of specific requirements related to the purpose of the group, the group’s composition, and the location of the group, or whether there exists an ideal general purpose moderator who can handle most if not all focus group interviews. (p. 69)

For the purposes of this research one moderator facilitated each of the focus group interviews. Although the facilitator is not a professional focus group moderator, her relationship with group participants can support acceptance during the interview process. Krueger (1994) admittedly stated, “at times an untrained moderator can achieve remarkable results” (p. 36).

The abilities of the researcher and moderator are important to the focus group method, as are the shared experiences of interview participants. “Focus groups are composed of people who are similar to each other” (Krueger, 1994, p. 17). The perspectives, demographics, and exposure to similar poverty programs were limiting features for this study. As previously stated, all interview participants had a child participating in the National School Lunch Program. If a parent did not have a child participating the National School Lunch Program, he or she was not invited to participate in this study.

“The researcher should decide who the target audience is and invite people with those characteristics” (Krueger, 1994, p. 18) to participate in the study. The participants from the social service agency purposefully were selected, and the interview questions did not limit conversations to one poverty-based school program. Rather, the interview questions elicited perspectives about all poverty programs that were known to and/or by the participants.

The demographics of the focus group participants were limited to parents from Ashtabula, Geauga, and Lake Counties that receive services from the Lake County General Health District. Most of the communities in Ashtabula, Geauga, and Lake Counties are rural but urban areas such as the cities of Ashtabula, Mentor, and Painesville were available for this study. “The rule for selecting focus group participants is commonality, not diversity” (Krueger, 1994, p. 14). Similarities of demographics may result among participants. The commonality of demographics may correlate to a limited or similar exposure to poverty-based programs. The programs available to children, or familiar to the participants, determined the range of poverty programs discussed.

Finally, the generalizability of the findings for this study to other groups was limited. Fern (2001) stated if a researcher includes participants who are representative of the studied population, limits responses relevant to the topic, and recruits participants independently, the results are generalizable. “This type of generalizability is based on the assumption that the degree to which some effect is to be observed in the future depends on the degree to which it has been observed in the past” (Fern, 2001, p. 125).

Conclusion

The information gained from focus group parents provides perspectives to educators that may benefit children living in poverty conditions. Although the voices of the students themselves are not included in this study, parents were asked to provide perspectives that may direct educators in the facilitation and development of poverty-based programs. The perspectives of the parents can provide opinions about programs that impact their children as well as recommendations for new programs that may be designed to benefit children and parents living in poverty.

The findings from the focus group interviews do not provide generalizations that can be applied across all groups. Rather, the findings from the focus group interviews are relevant to the participating audience, may have some generalizable implications for similar groups, and may extend the knowledge of administrators that facilitate and design poverty-based programs in this district.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As evidenced in the forthcoming literature review, the definition of poverty has changed since inception. I begin this review of literature with a discussion of poverty and include how the definition has evolved from the 1950s. Following the definition of poverty, I include a review of poverty thresholds, guidelines, and related measures. Poverty thresholds are necessary because bureaucrats use economic standards to determine eligibility for poverty-based programs. Programs are offered for both adults and children. I complete the review of literature with a summary of the importance of collaboration between agencies and poverty-based program participants.

The Definition of Poverty

Poverty is a term used by educators and bureaucrats to categorize individual and family eligibility for supplemental social services. Education and social program administrators follow national economic standards, such as the poverty threshold, when allocating supplemental social aid to children and families.

The official definition of poverty was developed by Mollie Orshansky in 1965 for the Social Security Administration. Poverty lines or family income needs were based on the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet (the Department of Agriculture's so-called "economy food plan") for households of given size and composition, multiplied by three. The multiplier was derived from a 1955 survey showing that, on average, families of three or more spent 35 percent of their after-tax income on food. Thus, the poverty lines for different households implicitly assume that the

poor should not have to earmark a larger proportion of their income for food than the nonpoor. The needs, standards, or poverty thresholds are projected backward and forward by indexing them for price changes using the Consumer Price Index. (Leidenfrost, 1993, Introductory section, ¶ 7)

The Congressional Budget Office identified two common factors, as noted by Orshansky (Fisher, 1997), for defining poverty. The first factor includes the number of members in a family classified by categories such as male/female, adult/child, below 18 years of age or above 65 years of age. The second factor includes the gross income earned by all members of a family. The two factors were key points for Orshansky when she created the formula for determining poverty thresholds.

Currently the United States Census Bureau is responsible for determining poverty thresholds each year. “Each year the Census Bureau updates the dollar figures used in the poverty level for inflation so that the purchasing power of a poverty-level income remains the same” (Porter, 1999, The Current Poverty Measure section, ¶ 4). Porter (1999) added that the Census Bureau determines poverty thresholds and guidelines using the statistical methods “set by Orshansky” (Porter, 1999, The Current Poverty Measure section, ¶ 4) in 1965. According to the Census Bureau,

If a family’s total income is less than that family’s threshold, then that family, and every individual in it, is considered poor. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated annually for inflation with the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and excludes capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing,

Medicaid, and food stamps). (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a, Poverty Definition section, ¶ 1)

Furthermore the Census Bureau stated, “the definition of poverty used by the Federal Government for statistical purposes is based on a set of money income thresholds which vary by family size and composition and do not take into account noncash benefits” (Leidenfrost, 1993, ¶ 1). The Census Bureau includes the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB’s) Directive 14 when establishing standards for poverty. The OMB’s definition of poverty is used to determine eligibility for anti-poverty programs.

Mollie Orshansky developed the statistical measure for determining the amount of money needed by individuals and families to buy food for a nutritious diet as well as have money to purchase items necessary for living during the 1960s. The U.S. Census Bureau updates the income thresholds to align with the current economic market. The fluctuating poverty measure is used by agencies such as the Congressional Budget Office, OMB, and U.S. Department of Commerce that serve as administrators for poverty programs. The agencies provide guidelines for local organizations that distribute resources to families and individuals with an income at or below the poverty threshold. A significant limitation with the current standardized method for determining the poverty thresholds and guidelines is that regional incomes and the local cost of living are not given consideration in the formula.

Poverty Thresholds Based on United States Department of Agriculture

(USDA) Food Plans

In 1965 poverty thresholds were established by referencing the four USDA food plans, “liberal, moderate, low-cost, and economy” (Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky

Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 2). The latter two measures were the basis for the two sets of poverty thresholds offered by Orshansky.

The low-cost plan, adapted to the food patterns of families in the lowest third of the income range, has for many years been used by welfare agencies as a basis for food allotments for needy families and others who wished to keep food costs down. Often, however the actual food allowance for families receiving public assistance was less than that in the low-cost plan, spending as much as this food plan recommends by no means guarantees that diets will be adequate. Recently the Department of Agriculture began to issue an “economy” food plan, costing only 75-80 percent as much as the basic low-cost plan, for “temporary or emergency use when funds are low.” The food plan as such includes no additional allowance for meals eaten out or other food eaten away from home. (Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 2)

The 1965 fiscal measures established for the poverty thresholds did provide enough money to purchase food for a diet that would sustain a family. Although government officials acknowledge that if the specified money were not spent directly on food the budget would fail to provide an adequate diet. “Using 1963 as a base year, she (Orshansky) calculated that a family of four, two adults and two children would spend \$1,033 for food per year. Using her formula based on the 1955 survey, she arrived at \$3,100 a year ($\$1,033 \times 3$) as the poverty threshold” (Willis, 2000, Poverty Thresholds section, ¶ 1). The Employment Policies Institute (2002) clarified the initial purpose of Orshansky “was not to provide a national poverty indicator. Instead, she wanted to

‘develop a measure to assess the relative risk of low-income status among different demographic groups of families with children’” (p. 4).

Table 3 represents the weighted average for nonfarm poverty thresholds for the economy level during 1963. The weighted average thresholds resulted from the combining of the 62 farm low-cost and economic plans and the 62 nonfarm low-cost and economy food plans. Orshansky developed a weighted cost instead of developing 248 separate categories.

Table 3

Poverty Thresholds

Size of family unit	Poverty thresholds at economy level [poverty thresholds]	Poverty thresholds at low-cost level [near-poverty/low income threshold]	Ratio of low-cost threshold to poverty threshold
1 person	\$1,539.00	NA	NA
1 person (under age 65)	\$1,580.00	\$1,885.00	1.19
1 person (aged 65 or over)	\$1,470.00	\$1,745.00	1.19
2 persons	\$1,988.00	NA	NA
2 person (head under age 65)	\$2,050.00	\$2,715.00	1.32
2 person (head 65 or over)	\$1,850.00	\$2,460.00	1.33
3 persons	\$2,440.00	\$3,160.00	1.30
4 persons	\$3,130.00	\$4,005.00	1.28

Table 3 continued on the next page

Table 3 continued from the previous page

Table 3

5 persons	\$3,685.00	\$4,675.00	1.27
6 persons	\$4,135.00	\$5,250.00	1.27
7 persons or more persons	\$5,090.00	\$6,395.00	1.26

(Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 15).

The poverty threshold included three additional elements beyond the cost of food. First, the actual size of a family was given consideration when establishing the budget necessary for purchasing food. The age and sex of the family members were categorized by the members under age 18 as well as the family members that were over age 65. Food consumption was believed to vary according to the characteristics that were formalized. Coupled with food costs was the amount of money needed to purchase the necessary nonfood supplies to care for a family. The amount of money that was needed to provide clothing, household items, and the like were added beyond the budget necessary for food. The third element was a comparison between food costs for a farm family and a nonfarm family. “Calculating food plan costs for each of the fifty-eight nonfarm family subcategories that Orshansky had established was a complicated process. The food plans that she was using included separate food cost figures for nineteen different age-sex categories of person” (Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 4). Allowances were made to assure that money would be available to help offset the cost of maturation of children.

For each subcategory of families with children, a combination of ages of children was chosen that yielded a food cost that was higher than the food costs of two thirds of the (simulated) families in that subcategory. “Because food requirements for children increase rapidly with advancing age and the food plan cost is already critically low, this protection was deemed necessary to ensure adequate allowance for growing youngsters.” Food plan costs for the 58 nonfarm family subcategories were calculated using January 1964 prices for the economy and low-cost food plans. (Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 4)

Orshansky did use varied measures to determine poverty thresholds for single and two person families.

Orshansky differentiated her thresholds not only by family size but also by farm/nonfarm status, by the sex of the family head, by the number of family members who were children, and (for one- and two-person units only) by aged/non-aged status. The result was a detailed matrix of 124 poverty thresholds, although the figures generally cited were weighted average thresholds for each family size. (Fisher, 1997, How Orshansky Developed the Poverty Threshold section, ¶ 4)

Poverty Thresholds and Poverty Guidelines

Poverty thresholds and poverty guidelines are two separate measures. When determining eligibility for school, state, and federal poverty programs, general health districts and welfare agencies reference federal poverty thresholds and guidelines established by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Poverty thresholds are established after the year is over, based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) from March of the current year. For example, the 1998 poverty threshold, which reflects the 1998 calendar year, was calculated by the 1999 March Current Population Survey. Until it is calculated, the poverty threshold is merely an estimate. Poverty thresholds are used mainly for statistical purposes and research, such as preparing estimates of the number of Americans in poverty each year. (Willis, 2000, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

Poverty guidelines are a simplified version of the poverty threshold. Poverty guidelines are set by the Department of Health and Human Services in the Federal Register. Guidelines are established at the beginning of each year and are based on the poverty thresholds from the preceding calendar year.

Programs and policies that use poverty guidelines to determine eligibility include Head Start, the National School Lunch Program, the Food Stamp Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Oregon Health Plan, and the Oregon Working Families Child Care Credit. These guidelines are used for many, but not all, federal, state, and local poverty programs. The Federal Earned Income Tax Credit is one example that does not use the poverty guidelines. Public Housing programs, such as Section 8, uses the area median income to determine eligibility. Poverty guidelines are often commonly called the “federal poverty level,” or “federal poverty line.” (Willis, 2000, Poverty Guidelines section, ¶ 2)

A distinct difference exists between the poverty threshold and poverty guidelines.

Although the two standards are not exclusive from one another, the poverty threshold is the determining factor for the guidelines.

Modifications and Challenges to the Poverty Thresholds

The 1965 poverty standards were adopted as a part of the “War on Poverty” (Willis, 2000, Poverty Thresholds section, ¶ 3) by the Johnson Administration and came under scrutiny in 1969 when the federal government’s Poverty Level Review Committee declared that the thresholds should be adjusted for price changes, but not for the general standard of living. Controversy arose because the adjustment for price changes of food was not enough to account for an overall cost of living increase. Rather, an adjustment to the poverty threshold should have considered the overall cost of living instead of making calculations based solely on food prices.

Resulting from deliberations of a Federal interagency committee in 1969, two modifications were made to the original SSA (Social Security Administration) poverty threshold:

1. The SSA thresholds for nonfarm families were retained for the base year 1963, but annual adjustments in the levels were based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than on changes in the cost of foods in the economy plan.
2. The farm thresholds were raised from 70 to 85 percent of the corresponding nonfarm levels. The combined impact of these two modifications resulted in an increase in the tabulated totals for 1967 of 360,000 poor families and 1.6 million poor people. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a, Poverty Definition section, ¶ 1)

The initial changes to Orshansky’s threshold formula were made to fix seemingly major problems that existed for members of society applying for social aid. Following the

changes by the SSA the Interagency Poverty Level Review Committee offered further adjustments.

On January 6, 1969, the Committee Chairman (Interagency Poverty Level Review Committee) presented a proposal for 1969 (applicable to data for 1968) under which the poverty thresholds would be indexed by applying the Consumer Price Index (rather than per capita cost of the economic food plan) to the poverty thresholds [at the economy level] for the base year 1963. Under this proposal, no change was to be made in either the farm/nonfarm ratio or the food plans used to calculate the base-year thresholds. At a meeting on March 7 (1969), the Committee accepted this proposal. It was also proposed and agreed that tabulations would be presented for two additional levels, one 25 percent above and one 25 percent below the poverty level. (Fisher, 1997, The 1969 Revision of the Poverty Thresholds section, ¶ 8)

Revisions for determining the poverty thresholds did not receive significant attention throughout the 1970s. Governmental interest in poverty standards was not a focus of concern until 1981. In 1981, three additional modifications were made to the poverty threshold.

1. Elimination of separate thresholds for farm families.
2. Elimination (by average) of separate thresholds for female-householders families and “all other” families (earlier termed “male-headed” families).
3. Extension of the detailed poverty threshold matrix to make the largest family size category “nine people or more.” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a, Poverty Definition section, ¶ 5)

Farm and nonfarm categories were joined by adjusting the nonfarm families differential to the level of farm families. This change was made because farm families needed the additional benefits to support their food consumption needs. The rural economic opportunities did not equate into sufficient benefits for farm families, thus benefits to farm families became the same as nonfarm families. Much like the change for farm and nonfarm families, female households and all other families were joined into one category at an averaged amount. The categorization of female and male-headed households was deemed as discriminatory against women by “the Justice Department’s Task Force on Sex Discrimination” (Fisher, 1997, The 1979 Fendler/Orshansky Paper and the 1981 Revision of the Poverty Thresholds section, ¶ 4) because women were being compensated at a lesser benefit rate. The joining of categories provided an equal benefits allowance for families regardless of female or male distinction. Also, two additional categories were added to the family composition matrix, as aligned with the expanded Current Population Survey (CPS). Families of eight and nine or more were recognized and compensated at a higher level to offset increased costs for food. The increase in benefits is appropriate because larger families needed additional resources to purchase food.

Each revision offered further clarification to the poverty threshold while eliminating categories that were used to differentiate poverty between groups. Although, the revisions continued not to account for varying regional economic standards or increase costs of consumable products other than food, the changes were warranted.

In 1990 President George H. Bush approved an analysis of the poverty thresholds. As noted, poverty thresholds had not received significant revisions or consideration for

the past 25 years. The study (The Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance), which received full Congressional funding, started in 1992 and lasted 30 months. The commission initiated a two-pronged approach.

One part of the study was a study of statistical issues involved in measuring and understanding poverty. (The other part of the study was a study of statistical issues that would be involved if a national minimum welfare [public assistance] benefit for low-income families with children were to be established.) The study was to focus on concepts, information needs, and measurement methods for such purposes. (Fisher, 1997, The National Research Council's Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance section, ¶ 2)

The Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance published findings of the study and a proposal for the poverty threshold in May 1995.

The Panel's proposal would continue to define poverty as economic deprivation. Rather than deriving poverty thresholds using a food plan and a multiplier, the Panel's proposal would derive a poverty threshold that would compromise a combined budget allowance for food, clothing, and shelter (including utilities), plus a small additional amount to allow for other needs (e.g., household supplies, personal care, and non-work-related transportation). To develop a poverty threshold for its reference family (two adults and two children), the Panel's proposal would set the food/clothing/shelter budget allowance as a percentage-the panel said that 78 to 83 percent would be a reasonable range-of medium annual expenditures by all two-adult/two-child families for these items according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey. (The Panel also expressed the

food/clothing/shelter budget allowance range as the amount spent for these items by two-adult/two-child families at the 30th to 35th percentiles of the distribution for spending on these items by such families.) The threshold would be derived by applying a relatively small multiplier (between 1.15 and 1.25) to the food/clothing/shelter budget allowance. After adjusting for the differences between the Panel's family resources concept and the current official Census definition of income, the range proposed by the Panel for the new threshold would be between 14 and 33 percent higher than the current poverty threshold; this would take into account the real growth in the general population's standard of living since the official poverty thresholds were first established three decades ago. (Fisher, 1997, The National Research Council's Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance section, ¶ 5)

A recommendation was also made by the Panel to update the threshold every year (by referencing a moderate three year business cycle) in accordance with the cost changes for food, clothing, and shelter. The Panel emphasized that the poverty threshold should be calculated using after tax income rather than the past practices that established thresholds by using after tax resources while applying the figures to before tax incomes.

Furthermore, the cost of medical care is difficult to incorporate into a poverty threshold because of the great variance and unique circumstances that may occur resulting in the need for medical attention. The Panel so stated that health care and medical expenses would not be included in the threshold.

The Panel did consider size and type of family as well as the geographic location of the family when determining the recommend poverty thresholds.

The poverty thresholds are increased each year by the same percentage as the annual average Consumer Price Index (CPI). The poverty thresholds are currently adjusted using the annual average CPI-U (1982-84 = 100). This base year has been used since 1988. From 1980 through 1987, the thresholds were adjusted using the CPI-U (1967 = 100). The CPI (1963 = 100) was used to adjust thresholds prior to 1980. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a, Poverty Definition section, ¶ 6)

Although the recommendations by the Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance have merit, they were not adopted and implemented as presidential administrations changed in 1995.

Refuting the Poverty Measure

David Satterthwaite (2001) stated that income-based poverty lines were established decades ago with two significant limitations.

First, the income levels on which they are based are too low; they make little or no allowances for the cost of non-food essentials such as transport, keeping children at school, and paying for water and health care, even though these services represent high costs for most low-income households. Second, they fail to account for such aspects of poverty as poor quality housing, inadequate access to emergency services and legal protection, and voicelessness within political systems. (Satterthwaite, 2001, What's Wrong with Income-Based Poverty Measures section, ¶ 3)

Supporting the claims of Satterthwaite, The Employment Policies Institute (2002) reported,

Even though most people recognize that poverty measurement is subjective and not entirely scientific, the government's official poverty measure is deeply woven into our political system. The government creates programs and policies designed specifically to reduce "poverty." Politicians carefully assess the political implications of the federal government's annual release of its poverty estimates. Eligibility for means-tested programs such as Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are based on current poverty guidelines. Even though most in the policy community admit that the current poverty measure has its flaws, there is no consensus as to whether or how it should be revised. (p. 1)

The poverty thresholds have not been significantly altered since inception. Problems with the poverty thresholds have been identified but political leaders have not directed significant changes to the poverty formula. Porter (1999) stated,

The poverty level set by Orshansky in the late 1960s is still used today. Each year the Census Bureau updates the dollar figures used in the poverty level for inflation so that the purchasing power of a poverty-level income remains the same. (The Current Poverty Measure section, ¶ 4)

Raising the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All of Us stated, "the official poverty level is so low that a family can be technically above it and yet have only half of the money it needs to pay for housing and essential needs" (Employment Policies Institute, 2002, p. 1). Whereas the Ms. Foundation reported, "the Census Bureau appears to be severely undercounting the number of poor families and its poverty threshold is unrealistically low" (Employment Policies Institute, 2002, p. 1). Concern has been raised

claiming the need to update the method for determining poverty. “The current poverty measure, developed in the late 1960s and based on data from the 1950s, is considered by most experts to be seriously out of date” (Porter, 1999, Proposed Changes in the Official Measure of Poverty section, ¶ 1) and erroneous. The Employment Policies Institute (2002) provided two examples of errors that were made when establishing the poverty threshold.

Although the need-based thresholds were defined in terms of after-tax dollars, the measure of family resources (income) was formulated in terms of before-tax income. This meant that income would be overstated for families who paid more in taxes than they received in government in-kind benefits (e.g., food stamps, housing subsidies, etc.), and understated for families who received more in government in-kind benefits than they paid in taxes. Another problem was that poverty rates could not be accurately compared across regions, states and cities because the thresholds were not adjusted for geographic differences in the cost of living. (p. 4)

At the direction of Congress in 1995, an expert panel was convened by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to study the poverty measure.

The flaws in the current official measure were thoroughly assessed by the Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance convened by the National Research Council in its 1995 report, *Measuring Poverty: A New Approach*. The current poverty measure does not reflect changes since the 1960s in consumption patterns, household composition, and the labor force patterns of American parents. It does

not account for the impact of health insurance coverage and health status on the well being of individuals and families. And it does not permit an accurate evaluation of the effect of in-kind government transfers or of tax benefits on poverty, because the official measure of poverty does not count these benefits in family resources. (Lew & Prewitt, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

The expert panel made several recommendations for changes in the way the government measures poverty. Based on those recommendations, the Census Bureau has developed several new experimental measures of poverty. The recommendations of the NAS expert panel primarily affects the way income and needs are measured. The panel's recommendations would not necessarily change the number of people counted as poor or affect who is eligible for government programs. Rather the purpose of the Census Bureau experimental poverty measure is to show how the expert panel's recommendations could be put into practice and to assess the impact of these alternatives.

The recommendations by NAS also included

An alternative method of measuring poverty with thresholds based on the cost of a basic bundle of needs, and a new definition of family resources defined as the value of money from all sources, plus the value of near-money benefits, and minus non-discretionary expenses. (Warren, 2002, p. 4)

Assistance and compensation benefits provided in the form of health care, cash welfare, and food stamps are not considered when determining the income of an individual or family for poverty threshold placement. "By failing to include income that many low-income people receive in the form of public assistance, some critics maintain that the extent of poverty is over-stated" (Willis, 2000, Critiques of the Official Poverty Measure

section, ¶ 1). Although critics argue that the measure of a family spending 30% of after tax income on food since 1965 has changed. Willis reported that families now spend about one-sixth of their after tax income on food with greater percentages going towards utilities, housing, and transportation.

Since the 1950s, however, family expenditure patterns have changed. Costs such as housing have risen faster than food costs. As a result food costs now make up a much smaller share of family budgets than they did in the 1950s, while expenditures for items such as housing make up a larger share. In addition, in the 1950s, few mothers of young children worked outside the home and few families paid for childcare. Today, childcare costs consume a substantial share of the budgets of many low-income families. And because more families now have two working parents, other work expenses also take a larger share of family budgets. (Porter, 1999, The Current Poverty Measure section, ¶ 5)

Critics of the poverty threshold contend that the calculation is remised by not including the cost of childcare. This oversight may have occurred

Because the families in the 1955 USDA household survey Orshansky used had one wage earner and a stay-at-home parent. Commuting and other travel and work associated expenses that are a part of modern life have a huge impact on family budgets. (Willis, 2000, Critiques of the Official Poverty Measure section, ¶ 3)

The bottom line is that the current system of measurement is out-dated and seriously underestimates the count of the number of poor people in this country. If the government were to acknowledge the true extent of poverty, it would need to dedicate a greater share of its resources to pay the costs of programs to help the

poor. It is unfortunately cheaper to use an outdated system of measurement so that fewer people will be in poverty by government standards. (Willis, 2000, New Challenges-The Living Wage section, ¶ 2)

Porter (1999) stated, “since the poverty measure is used by many government agencies and private organizations for a variety of purposes, it is unlikely that any change in the current poverty measure will be made without a great deal of public discussion” (The Census Bureau Experimental Measures section, ¶ 5). The amount of public discourse that needs to occur before changes will be made to the poverty threshold is significant.

Poverty in Society 1999-2002

The Diversity Council News reported in December 2002, Children living in poverty are more likely to be the victims of crime and violence. They will face inadequate food, clothing or health care or disruptions such as frequent moving. Children of poverty can expect to face high incidents of respiratory ailments and lead poisoning. Living in unstable homes, they are also less likely to learn the skills necessary to leave poverty behind, continuing the generational cycle of poverty. (Lind, 2002, p. 1)

Factors that perpetuate poverty can be found in generational, situational, urban, and rural poverty settings.

Although most people recognize that poverty measurement is subjective and not entirely scientific, ever since Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” the United States has tried to put a quantitative gauge on economic deprivation. The government’s poverty line is used to determine eligibility in many means-tested

assistance programs such as Medicaid, food stamps and cash welfare. The poverty counts are used to measure the economic well being of at-risk groups of families and individuals and the effectiveness of government anti-poverty programs.

Increasingly, poverty income thresholds are being used in proposals to set minimum wages or living wage mandates. (Employment Policies Institute, 2002, p. i)

The Census Bureau conducted a survey of some 28,000 households across the United States to gather information that could be coupled with the data from the 2000 census to determine information about poverty in America. Major findings from the survey indicated the following:

- The poverty rate in 2001 was 11.7 percent, up from 11.3 percent in 2000.
- In 2001, people below the poverty thresholds numbered 32.9 million, a figure 1.3 million higher than the 31.6 million poor in 2000.
- At 16.3 percent, the poverty rate for children remained higher than that of other age groups, but did not change between 2000 and 2001.
- For people 18 to 64 years old, the poverty rate rose to 10.1 percent in 2001, up from 9.6 percent in 2000.
- In 2001, there were 6.8 million poor families (9.2 percent), up from 6.4 million (8.7 percent) in 2000.
- For non-Hispanic Whites, the poverty rate rose between 2000 and 2001 (from 7.4 percent to 7.8 percent) as did the number who were poor (from 14.4 million to 15.3 million). Poverty rates for Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians and Pacific Islanders did not change between 2000 and 2001.

However, the number of poor Hispanics rose to 8.0 million in 2001, up from 7.7 million in 2000.

- The poverty rate in the South increased from 12.8 percent in 2000 to 13.5 percent in 2001. The poverty rates in the Northeast, Midwest, and West did not change.
- The poverty rate for people living in the suburbs rose from 7.8 percent in 2000 to 8.2 percent in 2001; the poverty rate did not change in central cities or in nonmetropolitan areas. (Dalaker & Proctor, 2002, pp. 1-2)

The number of people living in poverty increased from 2000 to 2001 from 11.3% (31.6 million people) to 11.7% (32.9 million people). This marked increase is the first back-to-back increase since the maintenance of poverty records in 1959. Coinciding with the increase in the number of people living in poverty, an increase in the number of children under the age of 18 increased. “The poverty rate for all children under 18 years of age was 16.3 percent, higher than the rates for people 18 to 64 years old and 65 and over (10.1 percent for each)” (Dalaker & Proctor, 2002, p. 4). Children account for 25.6% of the overall population whereas 16.3% live in poverty. Children under the age of six represent 18.2% of people living in poverty whereas “children under six living in families with a female householder, no spouse present, 48.9% were poor” (Dalaker & Proctor, 2002, p. 4). Although children under age 18 comprise the highest poverty rate per capita, the actual largest increase in the number of people living in poverty was that of 18 to 64 year olds.

The poverty rate for non-Hispanic Whites was 7.8% in 2001 whereas 22.7% of Blacks, 10.2% of Asians and Pacific Islanders, and 21.4% of Hispanics were living in

poverty. The greatest increase in actual number of people living in poverty occurred for non-Hispanic Whites. Non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanic Whites are the largest combination of ethnic groups accounting for people living in poverty at 69.1%.

The poverty rate for Blacks in 2001, 22.7%, did not change from 2000 and also was not different from the lowest ever measured (in 2000 and 1999); however, the poverty rate for Blacks remained higher than the rates for people of other racial and ethnic groups in 2001. (Dalaker & Proctor, 2002, p. 4)

Payne (2001) presented “the following ethnic percentages and numbers of poor children” (p. 12) as reported by the 1999 census (see Table 4).

Table 4

Children Living in Poverty

United States	Number of Children in Poverty in 1999	Percentage of Children in Poverty
All Races	12,109,000	16.9%
White	7,568,000	13.5%
African-American	3,759,000	33.1%
Hispanic*	3,506,000	30.3%
Asian-America	361,000	11.8%
Native American**	260,403	39.8%

Note. *Hispanics may be of any race. **Native American numbers from 1990 (not counted in 1999).

(Payne, 2001, p. 13).

Although Payne provides the number of children living in poverty, Table 4 does not specifically address the report by Renchler that stated “poor inner-city youth are seven times more likely to be the victim of child abuse or neglect than are children of high social and economic status” (as cited in Payne, 2001, p. 12). Child abuse and neglect are serious offenses against children. The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse (2002) and Neglect provide clarification of serious offenses against children by stating,

Child abuse and neglect is, at a minimum: any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm [to the child]. (What is Child Maltreatment section, ¶ 1)

The United States Census Bureau Current Measure of Poverty

With the variance in poverty thresholds being updated annually, clarification can be drawn as to the method the Census Bureau uses to determine the poverty line. “The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps)” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002b, How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty section, ¶ 1). For example, if the poverty threshold was \$21,665 in 2001 for a five member family (two children, mother, father, aunt) and the family’s income was accumulated as \$10,000 being earned by the mother, \$5,000 being earned by the father, \$10,000 earned by the aunt, and \$0 being earned by the children. The total family income is \$25,000. The family would not be considered poor because their income was higher than the poverty threshold for a family of five.

The Census Bureau measures income for poverty threshold standards in three forms.

In determining the official poverty threshold, the Census Bureau uses money income, before taxes. Money income includes “all labor income (wage and salary and self employment income), all government cash transfers (unemployment insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security), pensions, alimony, rent interest, dividends, and other money income.” “Market Income” is another definition where government cash assistance is subtracted from money income, and employer-adjusts the definitions by subtracting estimates of federal income and payroll taxes, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and state income taxes. Finally there is “comprehensive income” where the value if government assistance is added to “money income” including not only cash assistance, but the value of various subsidies and programs, such as housing subsidies, food stamps, school lunch programs, and health programs. This definition also makes adjustments for most taxes. (Warren, 2002, p. 4)

Table 5 lists the 2002 poverty thresholds for individuals and families according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The variance in dollar amounts accounts for the adjustments that are made per the CPI-U.

Table 5

Poverty Threshold

Size of family unit	Related Children under 18 years						
	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
One person (unrelated individual)							
Under 65 years	9,359						
65 years and over	8,628						
Two persons							
Householder under 65 years	12,047	12,400					
Householder 65 years and over	10,874	12,353					
Three persons	14,072	14,480	14,949				
Four persons	18,556	18,859	18,244	18,307			
Five persons	22,377	22,703	22,007	21,469	21,141		
Six persons	25,738	25,840	25,307	24,797	24,038	23,588	
Seven persons	29,615	29,799	29,162	28,718	27,890	26,924	25,865
Eight persons	33,121	33,414	32,812	32,285	31,538	30,589	29,601
Nine persons or more	39,843	40,036	39,504	39,057	38,323	37,313	36,399

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, Poverty 2001 section, ¶ 1).

The Impact of Poverty on Children

Contrary to many people's perceptions, less than half the poor (48%) are African American or Hispanic. Blank finds that 48% are white and the remaining 4% are Native Americans, Asians, or others. Roughly 43% of all poor live in families headed by a single parent, almost all of them by women. But 35% live in families

headed by married couples, and the final 22% are single individuals who live alone without relatives. (Smart Library, n.d., What Do the Poor Actually Look Like section, ¶ 1)

Furthermore Blank added that children with a single mother have the highest chance of being poor.

Blank says that there is a 40% chance that a single white mother will be poor, while black and Hispanic single mothers face a 60% likelihood. The growth in single-mother families is a primary reason why child poverty rates in America exceed 20%. (Smart Library, n.d., What Do the Poor Actually Look Like section, ¶ 2)

Poverty thresholds provide data concerning the number of people living below the poverty line, but many negative effects of poverty go unnoticed if only reported through statistical information. Poverty has a multitude of negative consequences on children. Attention must be given to the depth of poverty in which a family may be living as well as the chronological age of the children living in poverty. When formalizing poverty levels,

The Census Bureau calculates a “Depth of Poverty” measure or a ratio of family income to poverty. $\text{Ratio of Income to poverty} = \frac{\text{Family A's Income}}{\text{Family A's Poverty Threshold}}$. In this measure, a family's income is compared to the poverty threshold and expressed as a fraction. (Warren, 2002, p. 2)

Additionally the length of time a child lives in poverty has an impact on her or his education. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) stated, “for a small minority of children- 4.8% of all children and 15% of children who ever became poor-childhood poverty lasted

10 years or more” (p. 55). Still yet, poverty is a major concern for educators because “nearly 19 percent of U.S. children-about 13.3 million-live in poverty” (Olson, 2000, High Poverty Among Young Makes Schools’ Job Harder section, ¶ 1). Larry Aber, Director of the National Center for Children in Poverty, acknowledged that poverty rates have decreased since 1993 from a “10-year high of nearly 23 percent” (as cited in Olson, 2000, High Poverty Among Young Makes Schools’ Job Harder section, ¶ 1) for several reasons. A strong economy during the mid 1990s coupled with welfare reform in 1996 forced many parents to work resulting in additional fiscal resources being available for families with children. Aber stated that jobs of past welfare recipients may be low paying, but “even lower-wage jobs pay better because of an expansion in the federal earned-income tax credit” (as cited in Olson, 2000, High Poverty Among Young Makes Schools’ Job Harder section, ¶ 2). Although the number of welfare recipients may be decreasing, the number of children living in families that live within the poverty threshold has not subsequently adjusted according to William P. O’Hare, the coordinator of the *Kids Count Data Book*. In 1998, 5.8 million children lived in households with a working parent who fell within the poverty threshold of \$16,600. The 5.8 million is an increase of 1.5 million since the year 1989. “In 1997, nearly two-thirds of poor children under age 6 lived in families with at least one employed parent” (Olson, 2000, High Poverty Among Young Makes Schools’ Job Harder section, ¶ 4).

Poverty should not be thought of as just an urban phenomenon. Olson (2000) reported,

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, of the 5.2 million children under age 6 living in poverty in 1997, 60 percent lived outside urban

areas, including 37 percent in the suburbs and 23 percent in rural communities.

(High Poverty Among Young Makes Schools' Job Harder section, ¶ 10)

The Census Bureau provides that

Workers living in poverty areas earned an average of only \$15,521 during 1989, much less than the \$23,122 earned by those living outside such areas. At the same time, persons in poverty areas were over three times more likely than nonpoverty area adults to have received public assistance income that year (10 percent compared with 3 percent). (U.S. Census, 2002c, In Poverty Areas, Earnings Were Lower section, ¶ 1)

“The American Institute of Nutrition and the United States Department of Agriculture defines hunger as a circumstance in which an individual unwillingly goes without food for an intermittent or extended period of time” (Children’s Hunger Alliance, 2002, What is Hunger section, ¶ 1). The USDA reported, “more than 1. 2 million people in Ohio are hungry or at risk of hunger everyday” (Children’s Hunger Alliance, 2002, What is Hunger section, ¶ 1). Furthermore, Ballantine (1997) stated, “on any given night, at least 100,000 children are homeless” (p. 383) and that one in six have no health care at all.

Poverty Negatively Impacts the Physical and Cognitive

Development of Children

Dr. J. Larry Brown, Executive Director for the Center on Hunger and Poverty (2002) from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University reported,

An emerging generation of scientific evidence demonstrates a direct deleterious link between inadequate food and a variety of poor developmental outcomes. The

research shows that youngsters from food insecure and hungry homes have poorer overall health status: they are sick more often, much more likely to have ear infections, have higher rates of iron deficiency anemia, and are hospitalized more frequently. In short, going hungry makes kids sick. As a result, they miss more days of school and are less prepared to learn when they are able to attend, making the relationship between hunger, health and learning of far greater importance than we previously realized. (p. 4).

Dr. Brown also adds that children who suffer from food insecurity may have poorer mental health, experience social disruptions such as acting out or withdrawn, and “suffer greater rates of behavioral disorders” (Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University, 2002, p. 4). The Children’s Hunger Alliance states,

Food insecurity is a widely accepted, statistically verified way to measure hunger. The food insecurity measure was devised by the USDA and the Bureau of the Census in cooperation with several anti-hunger organizations. Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of safe, nutritionally adequate food that can be obtained in ‘socially acceptable’ ways (i.e., without stealing or scavenging). (Children’s Hunger Alliance, 2002, What is Food Insecurity section, ¶ 1)

A report from the Tufts University School of Nutrition states, “the primary factor associated with poor nutritional status in this country is poverty, the inadequacy of family resources” (Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1994, p. 3). Dr. Ernesto Pollitt, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of California, Davis concurs with the findings by Dr. Brown when stating,

We have now learned that even moderate undernutrition, the type seen most frequently in the United States, can have lasting effects on the cognitive development of children. Inadequate nutrition is a major cause of impaired cognitive development, and is associated with increased educational failure among impoverished children. (Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1994, p. 3)

The challenge identified by Dr. Pollitt underpins the thrust of poverty-based programs in that bureaucratic leaders must seek to include the research findings of the effects of poverty on children “into programs and policies which improve the nutritional status and cognitive development of our most vulnerable youngsters” (Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1994, p.3).

Payne (2001) stated, “regardless of race or ethnicity, poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to suffer developmental delays and damage, to drop out of high school, and give birth during the teen years” (pp. 11-12). The effect of poverty on the physical and mental well being of a child is concerning. “Research has found that extreme poverty, especially in early childhood, is associated with risk factors that can threaten early brain development, including malnutrition, exposure to toxins and violence, maternal depression, and very low-quality child care” (Olson, 2000, Poverty Highest Among Young section, ¶ 4).

“In the 1988 National Health Interview Surveys, parents reported that poor children were only two-thirds as likely to be in excellent health and almost twice as likely to be in fair or poor health as nonpoor children” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 57). For instance, low birth weight is higher among children born into poverty compared to

nonpoor children. The low birth weight is a result of poor prenatal care and limited budgets for food during pregnancy. Furthermore, “serious physical disabilities are more prevalent among children who were low birth weight infants, as are lower levels of intelligence in math and reading achievement” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 60). Coupled with the negative impact of low birth is the potential of a resulting stint in poverty that will lead to malnutrition of children through adolescence. The effect of a limited nutritional diet may lead to subsequent stunted growth. The data shows that from ages 2 to 17 the impact of a poor diet leads to a 2 to 1 variance of children being in the fifth percentile for height.

Another significant effect of poverty on children is the amount of exposure a child may have to lead poisoning. Alarming, 16.3% of children in poverty are reported to have a negative impact from lead poisoning whereas only 4.7% of nonpoor children have ramifications from lead poisoning. The result of lead poisoning exposure includes “stunted growth, hearing loss, vitamin D metabolism damage, impaired blood production, and toxic effects on the kidneys” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 60). Also exposure to lead poisoning has been linked to a decrease in intelligence quotient (IQ). Lead poisoning can be found in older homes with lead based paints. Children may eat the falling paint chips or inhale the paint chip dust that fills the air of older homes. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan estimated that 4 to 5 million children live in homes having excessive levels of lead and some 1.5 million children under age 6 have elevated lead levels in their blood.

Poverty also impacts a child’s cognitive development. “Children living in families that are below poverty are less likely to participate in preschool education than children

in families living at or above poverty (47 versus 59 percent, respectively)” (Pfeifer, 2003, p. 3). The impact of preschool education may alter the negative impacts that have been correlated to poverty conditions. “Very young children living in poverty are much less likely than are nonpoor children to be able to recognize the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their names, or read or pretend to read” (Child Trends Databank, 2002, Headline section, ¶ 1). Additionally,

Three-to-five-year old children living in poverty are much less likely to have the three or four cognitive/linguistic school readiness skills (the ability to recognize the letters, count to 20 or higher, write their names, or read or pretend to read) than are children living above the poverty threshold. Nineteen percent of young children living below the poverty threshold had three of four skills in 1999. In contrast, 45 percent living above the poverty threshold had three of four skills. Since 1993, the percentages have increased for children above the poverty threshold (from 40 to 45 percent) and decreased for children below the poverty threshold (from 23 percent to 19 percent). (Child Trends Databank, 2002, Differences by Poverty Status section, ¶ 1)

As a result of limited skills, children from poverty households are 1.3 times more likely to be identified as developmentally delayed and 1.4 times more likely to be labeled as learning disabled.

A recent study using data from the Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and the Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP) compared children in families with incomes less than half of the poverty threshold to children in families with incomes between 1.5 and twice the poverty threshold.

The poorer children scored between 6 and 13 points lower on various standardized tests of IQ, verbal ability, and achievement. These differences are very large from an educational perspective and were present even after controlling for maternal age, marital status, education, and ethnicity. A 6 to 3 point difference might mean, for example, the difference between being placed in a special education class or not. Children in families with incomes closer to, but still below, the poverty line also did worse than children in higher-income families, but the differences were smaller. (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 61)

Children living in poverty for four or more years scored six to nine points lower than children that never lived in poverty. The lower IQ scores on standardized tests do play a role in educational attainment. Although not specifically linked to IQ scores, students that lived in poverty were twice as likely to be retained (28.8% to 14.1%) and expelled (11.9% to 6.1) during the course of their formative educational years. The resulting dropout rate for poor children is “21 percent while nonpoor children dropped out at a rate of 9.6 percent” (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 58). The impact that poverty has starting with a low birth weight and leading to possibly lower IQ scores and higher drop out rates is a measurable consequence that varies by circumstances yet is universally negative.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported discrepancies existing between poor and nonpoor children in the area of emotional and behavior outcomes. Poor children scored at a higher percentage in the category of lasting behavior problems over three months, poor- 16.4% than nonpoor 12.7%,

On average children living in long-term poverty (defined by the ratio of family income to the poverty level averaged over 13 years) ranked three to seven percentile points higher (indicating more problems) on a behavior problem index than children with incomes above the poverty line. After controlling for a range of factors including mother's characteristics, nutrition, and infant health behaviors, the difference remained though it dropped in magnitude. This study also found that children who experienced one year of poverty had more behavioral problems than children who had lived in long-term poverty. (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 63)

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported that poor female teens are 3.1% more likely to give birth out of wedlock whereas 15.9% of children living in poverty reported experiencing hunger within the last month. Children living in poverty are 6.8% more likely to experience some form of child abuse and 2.1% more likely to experience a violent crime as compared to nonpoor children. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) stated,

Family income seems to be more strongly related to children's ability and achievement-related outcomes than to emotional outcomes. In addition, the effects are particularly pronounced for children who live below the poverty line for multiple years and for children who live in extreme poverty (that is, 50% or less of the poverty threshold). (pp. 67-68)

Poverty Programs for Adults and Children

Programs that are designed to mitigate the effects of poverty vary through intent and implementation. "A wide array of assistance programs and policies aid low-income households with children by providing either cash assistance payments or in-kind benefits

to meet specific needs” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 89). The focus of poverty-based programs are either to help the parent gain the resources to break out of poverty or to provide aid directly to children so that they will escape the cycle of poverty. “Food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance programs are targeted more broadly at low-income households and individuals” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 89) whereas programs such as the “Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the school nutrition programs, and Head Start are targeted specifically at children” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 89).

The food stamp program provides funds for families based only on financial need. “The Food Stamp Program (FSP) originated in the 1930s with a New Deal food stamp program largely designed to dispose of surplus agricultural commodities to stabilize farm prices” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 92). The FSP was discontinued in 1943 and not until 1962 did the program receive renewed interest. The 1962 program led to the establishment of the FSP as known today. “FSP expenditures exceeded combined federal and state cash expenditures through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) programs” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 92). AFDC has been renamed the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and works reciprocally with FSP in that the aide level remains the same even though the level of support from either organization may vary. The poverty measure used by the Census Bureau,

Differs substantially from the legislative definition of need used by Food Stamp Program (FSP) administrators in determining eligibility for benefits. More specifically, the differences are fourfold: (1) in the composition of the unit across which each person’s income is summed in determining unit income (household

composition dynamics); (2) in the asset test for FSP eligibility (asset limits); (3) in the time period over which the income is summed (the accounting period); (4) in the definition of a unit for purposes of including an individual in the poverty population or the FSP population (unit/income definition). As a result, the population below the poverty line differs in both size and composition from the poverty population eligible for food stamps. (Leidenfrost, 1993, ¶ 15)

The utilization of FSP benefits vary yearly but Devaney et al. (1997) stated,

Of nonparticipating households, approximately half were only eligible for the lowest benefit levels and most had household incomes exceeding the poverty level. Other reasons for nonparticipation included stigma associated with using food stamps, the administrative requirements for eligibility, lack of access to issuance offices, and perceptions that food stamps benefits are not needed. (p. 93)

In 1972 a special food stamp program was initiated for the benefit of “women, infants, and children (WIC)” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 94). At first WIC was pilot tested in an effort to provide additional food and nutrition for low-income women and children. WIC became a permanent program in 1974 under the direction of the Food and Nutritional Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This program is funded through federal grants; thus the program is not an entitlement and funding allocations vary on an annual basis.

Over the years, WIC has expanded and now serves almost seven million women and children per month. WIC focuses on the special nutritional needs of low-income pregnant women, infants, and children, based on the assumption that

insufficient nutrition during these critical development periods may result in adverse outcomes. (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 94)

WIC provides support through food vouchers, education about nutrition, and by providing information about social service organizations. WIC is similar to FSP in that the programs provide vouchers for foods and information about nutrition to low-income individuals.

WIC targets

Pregnant women (through pregnancy and up to 6 weeks after birth or after pregnancy ends), breastfeeding women (up to infant's 1st birthday), nonbreastfeeding postpartum women (up to 6 months after the birth of an infant or after pregnancy ends), infants (up to 1st birthday). WIC serves 45 percent of all infants born in the United States, and children up to their 5th birthday (Food and Nutrition Service, 2003a, Population Served section, ¶ 1).

The 87 state WIC agencies provide nutritional food supplements, nutrition education and counseling, and screening for other health and social services.

WIC is effective in improving the health of pregnant women, new mothers, and their infants. A 1990 study showed that women who participated in the program during their pregnancies had lower Medicaid costs for themselves and their babies than did women who did not participate. WIC participation was also linked with longer gestation periods, higher birth weights and lower infant mortality. (Food and Nutrition Service, 2003b, More About WIC section, ¶ 5)

Although not directly related to WIC or FSP the “National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) are federally sponsored nutrition

programs operating daily in the nation's schools" (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96).

"Nationally, over 25 million children in over 90 thousand schools participate in Child Nutrition Programs, making them one of the country's largest food service operations.

Ohio's food service programs serve over 1 million meals daily at over 4,000 sites" (Ohio Department of Education, 2002a, Introductory section, ¶ 5). Ohio schools provide NSLP and SBP benefits to eligible children.

During a school year, Ohio School Breakfast Programs serve more than 22,000,000 breakfasts at more than 1,400 sites. Schools that have started a breakfast program have reported improvements in student behavior and ability to perform in the classroom, enhancing the overall quality of the school experience. (Ohio Department of Education, 2002b, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

School lunch and breakfast programs are designed to help children while at school. "The Federal government subsidizes all school lunches and breakfasts served to children. Children receive free, reduced-price, or 'full-price' meals, depending on their family's size and income" (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96). The subsidies provided by the federal government benefit all students purchasing food through nutritionally balanced meals. School breakfast and lunch programs are required to follow the recommended daily allowance (RDA) standards when preparing meals for students.

Schools have the option to choose one of four patterns for menu planning:

NuMenus, Assisted NuMenus, Traditional Meal Pattern or the Enhanced Meal Pattern. Both the NuMenus and Assisted NuMenus patterns are nutrient-based. A computerized nutritional analysis is used to plan these menus. (Ohio Department

of Education, 2002a, What are the Meal Service Requirements for Lunch and Breakfast section, ¶ 2)

Following federal guidelines, school “lunches must include five items: meat or meat alternate, two or more vegetables and/or fruits, whole grain or enriched bread or bread alternate, and fluid milk” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96). Nutritional meals are provided for children through free or reduced price lunches and served “between 10:00am-2:00pm” (Ohio Department of Education, 2002a, What are the Meal Service Requirements for Lunch and Breakfast section, ¶ 1)

NSLP and SBP are available to both public and private schools. “The two programs make a substantial contribution to what children eat and represent a large investment of federal dollars” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96). NSLP was largely started during World War II because many poor men and women were denied assignment into the military because of physical limitations that result from poor nutrition.

The NSLP was created in 1946 to provide nutritious foods, either free or at low cost, to children during the critical school age years. Currently, the NSLP provides financial assistance and commodities to schools whose lunches meet required nutrition standards. (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96)

The SBP was started in 1966 for poor children that traveled a long distance to school. “It was largely a response to observations that many children came to school without eating breakfast and to concerns that skipping breakfast impeded school performance. The 1975 amendments to the Child Nutrition Act made the SBP a permanent program” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 96). Schools receiving federal funds for SBP must also follow RDA guidelines.

SBP breakfasts are supposed to provide approximately one-fourth of the RDA, and each breakfast must include a serving of fluid milk, a serving of either fruit and vegetable or a full-strength fruit or vegetable juice, and two servings of either bread or meat or their alternates. (Devaney et al., 1997, pp. 96-97)

Medicaid was established in 1965 to provide health insurance for low-income children. The Medicaid program works reciprocally with state and local agency resources to provide health care. “Medicaid requires that children receive what is called ‘early and periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment (EPSDT),’ and therefore, the Medicaid benefit package for children is generally comparable to most private health insurance plans” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 98). Medicaid is based on the current poverty level standards and was expanded in 2002 to include children through age 19.

Since the implementation of welfare reform, families across Ohio have made it a priority to become self-sufficient. In doing so, many families have opted to take entry-level positions that usually do not provide health care coverage that is both comprehensive and affordable. (Healthy Start and Healthy Families, 2003, Introductory section, ¶ 1)

Subsequently the Medicaid programs Healthy Start and Healthy Families offer comprehensive health care to low-income parents and families. Healthy Start and Healthy Families provide coverage for “doctors visits, prescriptions, hospital care, immunizations, vision and dental care, substance abuse, mental health services” (Healthy Start and Healthy Families, 2003b, Introductory section, ¶ 3) and other related health services.

Healthy Start provides coverage for children (up to age 19) living in families with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For example a

family of four can earn up to \$35,000 a year and qualify for health coverage for their children. Healthy Start also covers pregnant women in families with incomes at or below 150% FPL. (Healthy Start and Healthy Families, 2001, p. 4)

A child born to a mother that receives Healthy Start benefits will be covered for one year.

Healthy Families offers health coverage for the entire family (both parents and children) living in families with incomes at or below 100% FPL. For example a family of four can have an annual income up to \$17,650 and qualify for health care coverage through Healthy Families. (Healthy Start and Healthy Families, 2001, p. 4)

Healthy Families programs offer benefits much like the Healthy Start program but for all members of a family.

Poverty-based programs offer assistance to individuals and families based on need. In a similar light, housing programs were designed to provide assistance for low-income families to attain adequate living accommodations. “For more than a half of a century, the federal government has provided housing assistance to low-income households with the overarching goal of providing ‘a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family’” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 104). Housing assistance is offered through project-based subsidies to low-income families with a cooperative agreement between the federal government and private contractors. The

Household-based subsidies provide rent subsidies to families to use in existing privately owned apartments as long as the rent is below the fair market rent, which is set at approximately the 45th percentile of the local rents for units that

have been on the market during the previous two years. (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 104)

Unlike the FSP housing assistance is not guaranteed. Rather, housing assistance is based on a three level standard; low income, which means a person's income is 50% of the median local income, the cost of a house is 50% of actual income, or current housing conditions are substandard.

Poverty-Based Programs for Education

The federal government has made fiscal resources available to public and private education institutions through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. ESEA was aligned with the ambitious plans of President Lyndon B. Johnson when his administration launched the "War on Poverty" (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 1).

ESEA stands as landmark legislation in several respects. Politically, it represents Congress's first success, after decades of attempts, to provide large-scale general aid to education that overcame the traditional opposition from religious minority groups and states' rights advocates. These longstanding barriers fell when legislators developed a plan of state-and locally administered aid that would flow, at least theoretically, to private and parochial as well as public school children from neighborhoods heavily affected by poverty- though public schools have received the overwhelming share. (Levin, 1999, p. 125)

Furthermore,

Additional education laws were passed that build on the idea of categorical aid to provide extra assistance for children with disadvantages-migrant children, children for whom English was a second language, delinquent and neglected

children, and children with mental and physical handicaps. (Jennings, 2000, The Birth of Title I section, ¶ 9)

Title I serves as the foundation for ESEA programs.

In adopting Title I, Congress endorsed the idea that additional financial resources could make a difference in the education of poor and educationally disadvantaged children, simultaneously recognizing the fact that concentrations of poverty have an adverse impact on the ability of school districts to provide such aid. (Jennings, 2000, Expectations for Title I section, ¶ 2)

Thus ESEA funding to school districts was based on the number of poor children attending the district. At first the directive from the U.S. Office of Education was ambiguous. A rift between the traditionalist and reformists allowed for much discussion at the local level. Title I guidelines did not become clear until a comparability requirement was ordered. The comparability requirement,

Meant to ensure that the federal funds for the education of disadvantaged children were used in addition to-not in lieu of-state and local funding. Another provision was the “supplement, not supplant” requirement, which meant that services funded with federal dollars could not replace any educational services that a disadvantaged child would have received from state and local dollars in the absence of the supplementary federal aid. (Jennings, 2000, Early Implementation of Title I section, ¶ 4)

ESEA provides a description for the purpose and function of federal fiscal resources and how the allocations are expected to help children from low-income families. Federal guidelines for Title I attempt to combat poverty by stating,

- (1) although the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and other children had been reduced by half over the past two decades, a sizable gap remains, and many segments of our society lack the opportunity to become well educated;
- (2) the most urgent need for educational improvement is in schools with high concentrations of children from low-income families and achieving the National Education Goals will not be possible without substantial improvement in such schools;
- (3) educational needs are particularly great for low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, children with limited English proficiency, children of migrant workers, children with disabilities, Indian children, children who are neglected or delinquent, and young children and their parents who are in need of family-literacy services;
- (4) while Title I and other programs funded under this Act contribute to narrowing the achievement gap between children in high-poverty and low-poverty schools, such programs need to become even more effective in improving schools in order to enable all children to achieve high standards.
(Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ b)

Title I is the cornerstone of ESEA for disadvantaged children. "Title I-Part A Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies" (Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ 1) allocates funds to local schools to help children with reading and mathematics deficiencies. School districts may

extend Title I services into other core subjects such as science and social studies. “Title I was more a funding mechanism than a specific program or policy for helping at-risk students” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 189). The federal government provided limited guidelines to local education agencies in terms of identifying Title I participants. “Title I-Helping Disadvantaged Children Meet High Standards” (Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ 1) defined the use of fiscal allocations by stating,

The purpose of this title is to enable schools to provide opportunities for children served to acquire the knowledge and skills contained in the challenging State content standards and to meet the challenging State performance standards developed for all children. (¶ d)

Title I funds also include allocations for three subsequent programs, Title I Part B, Title I Part C, and Title I Part D. “Title I Part B-Even Start Family Literacy Programs” (Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ 1) is offered to minimize the educational limitations that are a result of poverty. Title I “Part C-Education of Migratory Children” (Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ 1) requires states and local education agencies to provide services for migratory children. Title I “Part D-Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk of Dropping Out” (Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, n.d., ¶ 1) requires the implementation of programs to counter dropout rates for neglected and delinquent children. Title I Part B, Title I Part C, and Title I Part D provide

administrators the flexibility to allocate federal fiscal resources in a manner that is aligned with prescribed guidelines and with the needs of local community members.

All Title I sections permit local fiscal agencies the opportunity to develop programs that meet the needs of the community that is being served. Title I programs have required parental involvement since inception and more specifically in section 1118 of the 1994 ESEA reauthorization. Parental involvement calls for parents to participate in the development of Title I programs and policies for a school district. Bob Witherspoon, Executive Director of the National Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents stated that Title I “parental involvement policy is ‘a solid framework’ for getting parents involved in schools. But he, like many, says it is not enough. He points out that many of the Title I schools are doing none or only part of what is required” (as cited in Struck & Vail, 1999, Introductory section, ¶ 2). Schools may satisfy the parental involvement requirement by providing resources that parents can use at home to help their children or schools may develop parent compacts that seek tutor or support for children while at home. Title I guidelines do not require administrating agencies to gain parental perspectives to determine how a program may increase the academic performance of a child. The limited required communication that exists between the directing agency and program participants typically occurs after the program has started or at the end of the fiscal year and does not include discussion of the method for service delivery. Parents are not provided an opportunity to express if they value the program or if the program increases the academic performance of their children.

Coupled with ESEA and as a precursor to Title I, Head Start was initiated in 1965 by the Johnson administration.

Over the years the program has matured into the nation's primary federally sponsored child development preschool program. Ninety percent of the children served are three and four years old; two-thirds are four-year-olds. About 13% are children with disabilities. The program is implemented with considerable variation around the nation to meet diverse community needs. (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 101)

Head Start programs are designed in accordance with Federal guidelines and planned with local expectations to meet the needs of the students who are being served.

The overall goal of Head Start is to bring about "a greater degree of social competence in preschool children from low-income families." Social competence includes cognitive, intellectual, and social development; physical and mental health; and adequate nutrition. Key principles of Head Start include providing comprehensive services (including education, health, nutrition, social services, and parent involvement), fostering the parent's role as the principle influence in the child's development, encouraging parents to be involved in policy and program decisions, and establishing partnerships with community agencies to improve the delivery of services to children and families. (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 102)

Head Start has been successful in providing services to children living below the poverty line but continues to strive to offer services to more students.

The offering of Head Start set forth the establishment of numerous before and after school programs. The time of an educational or supplemental program is not important unless the target population cannot receive the services or if the service needs

to be provided during a time outside of the school day. “An increasing number of mothers of school-age children are working, creating a need for after-school care” (Ballantine, 1997, p. 382).

After school programs are needed for a variety of reasons that are unique to the circumstances of the parents.

Many low-income children today are too much on their own, both physically and psychologically, and could benefit from safe, protected spaces to play, an extra measure of adult attention, additional help with homework, and greater opportunity to participate in art and sports activities. (Halpern, 1999, p. 82)

The greatest suppliers of after school programs include schools, social service organizations, “settlement houses and community centers, and national youth-serving organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and Police Athletic Leagues” (Halpern, 1999, pp. 83-84). Programs for children of poverty have been designed purposefully to help specific limitations that result from economic conditions.

The focuses of after school programs vary across the country.

Currently, after school programs serving low-income children face increasing pressure to play a role in helping those children acquire basic literacy skills and achieve school success. Yet low-and moderate-income children should have the same opportunities as their more advantaged peers; first to feel and be safe; second, to have some social and physical space of their own in which to develop their own thoughts, explore feelings, learn friendships, and learn how to handle interpersonal conflict; and third, to explore interests, and to test and nurture special abilities in arts, sports, or other areas. (Halpern, 1999, p. 92)

The need for supplemental school programs is based on an increasing working population with children. The need to earn money to support a family is complicated with the demands of providing before or after school child care. The federal supplemental school programs provide an avenue for parents to work while offering a safe and educationally rich environment.

Communication Between Agencies and Participants

Poverty-based programs may be funded either at the federal or state level with resources being administered at the local level through agencies such as schools and general health districts. Communication between the local distribution agencies and the people being served is not an area that typically is examined. Research concerning academic and poverty programs often examines effectiveness in relation to established guidelines and fiscal accountability in relation to outcome based expectations. An example of such reporting of program effects is evident in the development and distribution of school report cards. “School report cards tell the public and parents how their schools are doing, by listing achievement scores, absenteeism and graduation rates, teacher-pupil ratios and other measures of school effectiveness and resources (Struck & Vail, 1999, Report Cards section, ¶ 1). School report cards establish quantitative measures as a determinant for effectiveness. The assessments used to evaluate student performance statewide are typically standardized achievement and proficiency tests. District report cards using standardized tests to report student achievement are aligned with the requirements of Title I that call for districts to use “state assessments to determine whether the schools making adequate progress toward enabling students to meet the State’s challenging student performance standards” (United States Department

of Education, 1996, LEA Process for School Review and Improvement section, ¶ 1).

Reporting student academic performance using standardized tests has evolved as Title I accountability measures have changed. Vinovskis (1999) reports “early state and local Title I evaluations were not rigorous or directly comparable to each other” (p. 190). Not until the 1970s did a “rigorous or directly comparable” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 190) report on Title I come to fruition. “The most detailed and rigorous analysis of Title I in the 1970s was the Sustaining Effects Study by the System Development Corporation. In this nationwide study, data are collected on 120,000 students from a representative sample of 300 elementary schools” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 190). This study tracked the academic progress of a group of students over a three-year period. Other quantitative studies of this sort are included in the *Overview and Inventory of State Education Reforms: 1990 to 2000* conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics. This study reports on educational reforms and programs having comparable quantitative data. The executive summary states “the 1990s continued a trend from the 1980s in which states shifted their focus from educational input, such as per-student expenditures on instructional materials, to educational outcomes, such as the percentage of students attaining a score of ‘proficient’ on a statewide assessment” (United States Department of Education, 2003d, p. vii). Additionally the United States Department of Education (2003e) reports in *A Snapshot of Title I Schools, 2000-01* the findings from a three-year study of Title I programs across the nation with information “based on survey data that rely on respondents’ self-reports” (United States Department of Education, 2003e, p. 10). Focus group and individual interviews data are not included in these major reports. Actual direct interaction with program recipients is rarely used as an assessment measure. “One of the

major difficulties in conducting participatory evaluations is overcoming the power differences ingrained in a service model that often disempowers program participants” (Nichols, 2002, p. 1). Many reports of program effectiveness are grounded in statistical results rather than communication. But, “school districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative approaches in order to obtain Federal education dollars” (Baker & Soden, 1998, Introduction section, ¶ 1). The conflict concerning communication between agencies and program participants is

What constitutes effective communication. Confusion persists regarding the activities, goals, and desired outcomes of various parent involvement programs and policies. A major source of this confusion is the lack of scientific rigor in the research informing practice and policy. (Baker & Soden, 1998, Introduction section, ¶ 2)

Researchers need to gain the perspectives of parents to determine how poverty based programs help children and assist parents with their children.

Program administrators need to communicate with parents concerning program usefulness. Buttery and Anderson (1999) stated

Schools must establish clear and efficient communication with parents, using a regular schedule of useful memos, newsletters, phone calls, and a calendar of activities for an entire year. Printed information must be easily accessible, and readability issues such as vocabulary, length, and clarity, color, and style must be considered. (p. 5)

Administrators may find the recommendations by Buttery and Anderson helpful when communicating and seeking perspectives on poverty-based programs from participants.

Research concerning program usefulness and participant benefits is not always reported in context.

Despite the validity of some studies, much parent involvement research to date contains serious methodological flaws, which result in a lack of confidence in their findings and limits their accuracy and usefulness. In general flaws in existing research fall into four areas: use of non-experimental design, lack of isolation of parent involvement effects, inconsistent definitions of parent involvement, and non-objective measures of parent involvement. (Baker & Soden, 1998,

Methodological Limitations in Existing Research section, ¶ 1)

Researchers may benefit federal and state agencies by developing and conducting legitimate research concerning effective communication between administrators and program participants. Open lines of communication need to exist at the local level so that communication can be fostered and productive between local program administrators and federal or state governing organizations. The establishment of communication may lead to programs with greater usefulness and flexibility for local agencies and participants.

Summary

The poverty threshold was developed by Mollie Orshansky and was adopted by the Johnson Administration as the official measure of poverty. Although the thresholds have been criticized, alternative means for establishing a poverty line have not been implemented by political leaders. No reform idea for the poverty threshold has replaced the formula established by Orshansky in 1965.

Education programs such as Title I and Head Start receive federal fiscal resources to help low income children. The goals of educational programs are to provide an equitable learning experience for low-income children in relation to their middle and upper income peers. The effectiveness of federal education programs is dependent upon the measures used in their evaluations. Each federal program includes requirements for resource allocation as well as selection of participants. Significant discretion is given to school personnel when developing Title I or Head Start programs. The latitude to educators is provided because federal grant administrators want local schools to establish programs that will meet the needs of their community.

For households to escape from poverty and enjoy all the other benefits of development, they need to be able to participate increasingly in higher value-added activities, for which demand is growing as incomes grow. For the rural poor, this means expanding and diversifying both agricultural production and into more non-farm activities in rural areas when the needed skills, technologies, and other inputs can be made available so as to compete with producers in other locations; as this happens the rural area becomes more inter-linked in new ways with the urban centers and eventually takes on urban characteristics itself. To escape poverty some, or all members of some rural households, especially from areas that are particularly resource-poor or with high transport costs, may have to move to where economic prospects are greater. How the country manages the shifts of economic structure and demographics, will affect the growth, nature, and persistence of poverty in both rural and urban locations. (The World Bank Group, 2003, Towards an Integrated Rural-Urban Perspective section, ¶ 1)

Universally the impact of poverty is negative for all children and adults. Social service administrators need to design programs that help children and parents who are living in poverty conditions. Although, for programs to be evaluated or even designed, social service administrators need to listen to people that participate in the poverty-based programs to determine where changes need to be made or how programs should be developed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Focus Group Methodology

Focus group interviewing as a research method was recognized early in the 20th century as a valuable way to gain experienced perspectives on relevant social issues and theories. “The use of group interviews dates back to 1926 when Emory Bogardus tested his social distance scale (Bogardus, 1926)” (Morgan, 1993, p. 21). The initial use of focused interviews, as they were previously known, by social scientists was to delve into the experiences and perspectives of people. The focus group interview style that is used in current research gained greater acceptance as a valuable research method in the 1940s. “The focused group interview had its origins in the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University in 1941, when Paul Lazarsfeld invited Robert Merton to assist him in the evaluation of audience response to radio programs” (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 9).

Focus group research has endured criticisms throughout the years and has emerged as a valued methodology that can be used to probe areas of interest with people that have life experiences with a specific phenomenon.

Robert Merton and his colleagues also used the group interview in studies of the social effects of mass communication (Fiske, Kendall, & Merton, 1956). Later Merton adapted the focused interview style to individuals and discovered the role of *psuedogemeinschaft* in the manipulation of group members (Merton, 1987). (Morgan, 1993, p. 22)

Merton and his colleagues are credited with developing focus group research into a legitimate methodology that is today accepted as scholarly research.

Focus groups have been commonly used in market research since the late 1960s, although some packaged food marketing organizations used the technique as early as the late 1950s, and some people even trace the beginning of the focus group technique back to the publication in 1941 of the focused interview by Robert K. Merton, Marjorie Fiske, and Patricia Kendall. Most research practitioners agree, however, that the technique began to be used regularly only in the late 1960s and early 1970s and that it has grown in popularity every year since. (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 167)

Focus groups foster interaction between participants during the interview.

“Because the interaction in focus groups provide a clear view of how others think and talk, they are a powerful means of exposing professionals to the reality of the customer, student, or client” (Morgan, 1993, p. 16). Researchers in the field of marketing and education are using focus group interviews to gather information about issues that are pertinent to their audiences.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the focus group business has been a growing industry as more organizations realize the benefits of using well-conducted qualitative research to help in the planning and assessment of marketing programs. While there are no official statistics that cover the qualitative research industry, it would not be surprising to find out that the number of groups conducted in the United States probably doubled between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 188)

The Development of Focus Group Research

“The intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants” (Krueger, 1994, p. 11). Thus interviewing people with life experience in a specific social setting became an acceptable method for questioning and gathering information that is not based on direct individual interview practices. “It is the presence of others that enhances the intensity of interaction and, ultimately, the richness of the data. The interchange-a dynamic give and take-stimulates respondents to analyze their views more intensely than in an individual interview (Calder, 1977; Hedges, 1985)” (Morgan, 1993, p. 192).

Focus group interviews were an effective research method for this study according to Morgan (1993) because

Group interviewing is a research technique that takes advantage of group dynamics to produce new and additional data. The group interview is an excellent mechanism for bringing the researcher closer to even more respondents, it is flexible, and it permits considerable probing (Wells, 1979). (p. 32)

Additionally focus groups “are being used by social scientists to study a variety of issues, including those related to low-income minority populations (Glasser & Glasser, 1970; Goodwin, 1983; Hudgins, Holmes, & Locke, 1991; Lengua, Roosa, Schupak-Neuberg, Michaels, Berg, & Weschler, 1992)” (Morgan, 1993, p. 185). All focus group participants in this study were from low-income families and several were from minority populations.

“Focus group interviews were born out of necessity” (Krueger, 1994, p. 7). Social scientists became apprehensive about personal interview validity and felt that surveys were inadequate methods for gaining perspectives on social issues. Social researchers

wanted to minimize their influence on interview outcomes and gain a greater perspective from the people that actually participate in the social circumstance being investigated.

Focus group interviews typically have six characteristics or features. These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (1) people, (2) assembled in a series of groups, (3) possess certain characteristics, and (4) provide data (5) of a qualitative nature (6) in a focused discussion. (Krueger, 1994, p. 16)

The focus group design selected by the researcher for this study included four to eight parents that participated in an interview sessions lasting 90 to 120 minutes and led by one moderator.

Advantages of Focus Group Research

Focus group interviews have several advantages for research. Shamdasani and Stewart (1990) identified advantages of focus group research that are relevant to this study.

Although focus group research can produce quantitative data, focus groups almost always are conducted with the collection of qualitative data as their primary purpose. This is their advantage, because focus groups produce a very rich body of data expressed in the respondents' own words and context. (p. 12)

As a result of this study, the perspectives gained from the focus group interviews provided rich insight about existing poverty programs as well as programs that may need to be developed.

Focus group interviews also allow for two direct forms of communication with the participants. First the researcher developed interview questions with the help of a

moderator who has personal knowledge of the participants. The questions sought to generate responses and communication among participants.

The open response format of a focus group provides an opportunity to obtain large and rich amounts of data in the respondents' own words. The researcher can obtain deeper levels of meaning, making important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning. (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 16)

Second, the moderator was able to probe participants for greater depth to responses. The opportunity to probe for greater depth in responses can be generated through group interaction.

Focus groups allow respondents to react to and build upon the responses of other group members. This synergistic effect of the group setting may result in the production of data or ideas that might not have been uncovered in individual interviews. (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 16)

“Clearly, the thing that distinguishes focus groups is the presence of group interaction in response to researchers' questions” (Morgan, 1993, p. 15).

Additionally, focus group interviews allow for a review of data by the researcher. Each interview session was videotaped and audiotaped. “Later detailed examination of the recorded session allows additional insight and also can help clear up points of disagreement among analysts” (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 19). The opportunity to review the interviews allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of perspectives that were offered as well as to read the body language and facial expression of the participants. The researcher clarified participant contextual responses with the

moderator. If necessary, the moderator may conduct member checking with the participants.

Disadvantages of Focus Group Research

Seemingly no research technique is without limitations as is the case with focus group interviews.

Focus group research has been the subject of much controversy and criticism.

Such criticism is generally associated with the view that focus group interviews do not yield “hard” data, and the concern that group members may not be representative of a larger population. (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 12)

The design of this study adhered to traditional focus group interview procedures and yielded qualitative data. Each interview participant has a child participating in the National School Lunch Program, thus making their families eligible for other poverty-based programs (e.g., School Breakfast Program, Food Stamps, WIC, FSP, etc.). The participants were representative of the larger poverty population because their incomes fall below the poverty line thus qualifying their children and family members for poverty-based programs.

Furthermore, the interview data from the groups was transcribed and coded for emergent isomorphous themes. The themes were discussed with the moderator to ensure accuracy. When necessary, member checking occurred between the moderator and the focus group participants.

A further disadvantage of focus group interviews is the sample size. Fern (2001) stated, “focus group research is criticized because the sample sizes are small and samples are not selected using probability methods. Therefore, the samples are not representative

and the focus group results are not generalizable” (p. 121). Critics challenge the legitimacy of focus group participants because they make an extra effort to attend interview sessions and may not be representative of the sample being sought. To account for this limitation the researcher offered lunch and transportation to parents that had a child participating in the NSLP. The moderator, based on the demographic characteristics determined by the researcher, identified and asked parents to participate in this study. Each parent in the study voluntarily participated and was asked to sign an Informed Consent Form prior to the interview session (see Appendix E).

Additionally,

The interaction of respondents with one another and with the researcher has two undesirable effects. First, the responses from members of the group are not independent of one another, which restrict the generalizability of results. Second, the results obtained in a focus group may be biased by a very dominant or opinionated member. More reserved group members may be hesitant to talk.

(Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 17)

The moderator “must be sensitive to group dynamics such as how the opinions of one member can sway others or to how relations outside the group influence response patterns within the group or how size effects response patterns” (Morgan, 1993, p. 33).

The moderator was trained by the researcher to be cognizant of all group participants and to seek opportunities for probing during the interview that may unveil additional information. Although the moderator did not bias the interviews by adding personal perspectives, subsequent probing or furthering of a participants’ comments were fostered. The moderator probed in a manner that provided rich perspectives for each question

without leading participants to a desired response. Also, the researcher did not participate in any of the interview sessions, thus participant and researcher interaction did not occur.

Research Design

For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought four demographic groups consisting of four to eight parents that were convened to participate in interviews lasting for 90 to 120 minutes. The researcher, with the help of the moderator, developed 11 interview questions that were asked during the interviews. The moderator's knowledge of the participants helped to clarify words to be used in each question.

When developing the interview guide, there are two general principles that should be observed. The first suggests that questions be ordered from the more general to the more specific. This means that questions of the most general and unstructured nature should be placed early, and more specific questions-which may suggest specific responses to the more general question-should be placed near the end of the guide. Second, questions should be ordered by their relative importance on the research agenda. Thus the questions of greatest importance should be placed early, near the top of the guide, while those of lesser significance should be placed near the end. (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 61)

Much of the richness of this study relied on the strength of the moderator. The moderator had an existing relationship with the interview participants. The relationship was extensive because the moderator conducts annual group meetings with the parents designed to build group support and life skills. The existing relationships with participants did not compromise the research because conducted group meetings did not focus on program usefulness in relation to child academic and social achievement and

parental support of children academically or socially. Of the four groups, only the generational poor rural parents did not have a relationship with the moderator that was supported by regular meetings.

The prior knowledge of the participants by the moderator allowed her to probe participants for greater depth in responses. The moderator and the researcher met prior to the interviews to clarify the purpose of each question. By knowing the purpose of each question, the moderator was able to seek appropriate information during the interview sessions.

The interviews were conducted in conjunction with the Lake County General Health District at common group meeting locations in Ashtabula and Painesville, Ohio. The interviews were videotaped and audiotaped. The moderator and the participants determined the seating arrangement. “Typically, focus group participants are allowed to arrange themselves around the room at a table without direction from the moderator. People tend to choose preferred seating positions” (Fern, 2001, p. 64). In this effort the researcher setup the video and audiotapes prior to the interviews. The moderator chose to use a circular seating pattern that was already familiar to participants from their weekly group meeting. Interesting, “A circular pattern in which the interviewer is symbolically placed as one of the group has been found most conducive to full and spontaneous reporting” (Fiske et al., 1990, p. 139).

Focus Group Sample

“Choices about the number of groups and the sampling process are judgment calls on the part of the researcher (Blalock, 1984; McGrath et al., 1982)” (Fern, 2001, p. 122). This study consisted of four types of parent groupings. “The more homogeneous the

group, the better the participants will relate to each other in the discussion” (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 46). The homogeneity of each group led to greater dialogue between participants.

Jourard (1964) found that individuals are selective in their self-disclosure and the decision to reveal is based on perceptions of the other person. In his study of self-disclosure Jourard found that “subjects tended to disclose more about themselves to people who resembled them in various ways than to people who differ from them.” (Krueger, 1994, p. 13)

The sample for this research included parents that have at least one child participating in the National School Lunch Program. “It is generally acknowledged that focus groups should be composed of 8 people, give or take 2. There is evidence, however, that throughout the focus group industry, group size is diminishing to as few as 2 group members” (Fern, 2001, p. 161). A small sample may still provide relevant information to a research interest. The significance of participation in the NSLP was that each participant had a child participating in a poverty-based program. Although children of the participants may be eligible for additional poverty-based programs, NSLP was the minimum for group participation. Furthermore each parent was from Ashtabula, Geauga, or Lake Counties in northeast Ohio and affiliated with the Lake County General Health District. “A key assumption of focus group interviewing is that individuals with common concerns and experiences are more willing to share viewpoints and disclose personal information (Calder, 1977; Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956; Smith, 1972)” (Morgan, 1993, p. 192).

Participants were divided into “homogeneous group(s) of respondents” (Morgan, 1993, p. 186) to discuss their perspective on poverty programs. The focus group participants were categorized based on the demographic factors of generationally or situationally poor and by the geographic living conditions of rural or urban. From these demographic and geographic factors, interview participants were assigned to an appropriate interview groups.

One group of participants includes generational poor urban parents with a child participating in the NSLP and receiving additional assistance from the Lake County General Health District. “Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer” (Payne, 2001, p. 10). The perspectives from these parents are based on long-term participation in poverty-based programs. Insight can be offered as to how poverty programs are helpful as well as reasons why the programs do or do not help a child and family break the cycle of poverty. These participants can offer perspectives pertaining to new programs that may lift their child and family out of impoverished living conditions.

A second categorical group consists of generational poor rural parents with children participating in the NSLP and receiving assistance from the Lake County General Health District. Not all of these participants have worked directly with the moderator at the Lake County General Health District. It seems important to select this group as part of the study because as Satterthwaite (2001) stated rural poor face different challenges than urban poor. Rural poor families may need to travel a distance to obtain work or may have to move as a family based on seasonal employment opportunities. Generational poor rural parents can offer perspectives on how existing poverty programs

impact their children as well as how new programs may offer assistance that is needed to break their cycle of generational rural poverty.

A third interview grouping consists of situational poor urban parents with children participating in the NSLP and receiving assistance from the Lake County General Health District. Situationally poor parents, according to Blank (Smart Library), typically have lost a family member who was a source of income or the primary income supplier for the family lost his or her job. This group possesses skills and attitudes that are advantageous for leaving poverty living conditions. Situationally poor typically view their circumstance as temporary. This group of parents provides a short-term poverty perspective of how assistance programs are beneficial or limited in terms of helping their children and families exceed poverty living conditions. Depending on particular personal circumstance, these parental perspectives on existing programs and new program development may address measures that help situationally poor families with similar problems.

A fourth participant grouping includes situational poor rural parents with children participating in the NSLP and receiving assistance from the Lake County General Health District. Again this group is situationally poor as a result of an event or limiting circumstance. According to Miller (1998), situationally poor have the attitude that they will return to their previous living conditions after they resolve the circumstance that caused them to become poor. The perspectives of this group addressed poverty-based programs from people living in rural areas. The needs of rural parents and their children can be offered by this group and maybe different than the needs presented by parents from urban areas. Subsequently, the rural parent perspective offers views of how existing

programs are useful and how programs can be improved or developed that would meet the needs of these rural children and their families.

The researcher sought homogeneity of groups to foster dialogue among the participants.

Closely related to group cohesiveness is group compatibility—the extent to which members of a group have similar personal characteristics (e.g., needs, personality, attitude, etc.). Compatibility has implications for effective group performance and group satisfaction. In general, highly compatible groups perform their tasks more effectively than less compatible groups, because less time and energy are devoted to group maintenance (Haythorn, Couch, Haefner, Langham, & Carter, 1956; Sapolsky, 1960; Schutz, 1958). Furthermore, compatible groups experience less anxiety and greater satisfaction than incompatible groups (Cohen, 1956; Smelser, 1961). (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, pp. 42-43)

The moderator for the group interviews is a licensed social worker that has gained the trust of the interview participants through interaction at the Lake County General Health District. Although the moderator is not economically eligible for poverty-based programs, her relationship with the interview participants has been developed over the course of several years. The moderator developed her relationship with the participants by acting as a resource for social service programs and by providing needed counseling. The interview groups have a non-threatening environment because the participants have an existing communicative relationship with the moderator and are familiar with the setting in which the interviews take place. The social worker is not a professional

moderator, but possesses the skills necessary to ask the scripted questions and to probe for additional information when the opportunity occurs during the interview.

As the primary researcher I provided training for the moderator prior to the interview sessions. The training included a review of the consent form that was to be distributed and collected from the participants prior to the taped interviews. We discussed the design of the room and the desired location of the moderator during the interviews. The interview script provided an opportunity for the moderator to discuss concerns and for her to provide me with advice on the wording of the questions. We agreed that video and audiotapes recorders were to be set-up prior to each interview session and before participants entered the building.

Focus Group Moderator

“Few people involved in qualitative research today would not agree that the most important element in the focus group process is the moderator” (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 73). I have utilized a licensed social worker from the Lake County General Health District as the moderator. The moderator has worked at the Lake County General Health District for the past 13 years and interacts with the interview participants on a weekly basis. Only the generational poor rural parents have not had a regular meeting relationship with the moderator. The minimum amount of time the moderator has known most participants was two years whereas some relationships have developed over the past 13 years. The selected moderator’s qualifications and relationship with the group members is a strength for this study. Her knowledge of the participants and expertise on poverty programs brings great credibility to her leading the groups.

I have had a limited working relation with the moderator through a prior focus group study that I asked her to conduct as a pilot study during the fall of 2002. The moderator facilitated one focus group for the researcher that queried perspectives of parents with children participating in poverty-based programs and living in poverty conditions. The perspectives that were offered by the participating parents probed how existing poverty-based programs impacted their children both academically and socially. The moderator did not receive compensation for facilitating any of the focus groups for the researcher.

The moderator was flexible with group participants and provided a good awareness during the interviews “so that comments brought up early in a group can be dealt with during the natural flow of the conversation” (Edmunds, 1999, p. 72). A good memory coupled with strong listening skills afforded the moderator time to probe group participants for more detailed information. Greenbaum (1998) stated,

It is essential that the moderator listen to what the participants are saying. A moderator must not miss participants’ comments because of lack of attention or misunderstanding. The effective moderator knows how to paraphrase, to restate the comments of a participant when necessary, and to ensure that the content of the comment is clear. (p. 77)

A good moderator knows the difference between probing the focus group participants and leading them. When a participant makes an insightful comment and then trails off without providing adequate explanation, the moderator should, for instance, ask why the participant feels that way. (Edmunds, 1999, p. 73)

The moderator for this study probed the responses of the participants during the interviews.

In this situation the interviewer is very involved with the direction of the interview or as someone who exercises considerable control over the directions of the interview by administering a structured and ordered set of items or by constantly keeping the group on track. (Morgan, 1993, p. 27)

As stated, I met with the moderator prior to group interviews to clarify research questions and to select group participants.

The moderator served in the place of this researcher during the focus group interviews. “The prototypical role for the moderator is to manage the research process, which involves preparation, implementation, and postgroup procedures as well as analysis” (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 73). The researcher asked the moderator to participate in developing the interview questions, help select participants for each group, probe the participants when appropriate during the interview, and if necessary, conduct member checking to clarify participant responses.

Focus Group Interview Questions

The researcher, with the help of the moderator, developed the interview questions. The moderator provided suggestions to me that clarified the purpose of each question and provided words that were meaningful to the participants. The use of 11 questions for this study was appropriate based on the findings of Shamdasani and Stewart (1990) who stated, “in practice most interview guides consist of fewer than a dozen questions” (p. 62). This study consisted of the following 11 questions that were asked to each group.

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school district do

- your children attend (what grade are your children in)?
2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have you participated in the program(s)?
 3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.
 4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.
 5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.
 6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children's achievement in school? Please explain.
 7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children's performance in school?
 8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?
 9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?

10. As a parent what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Data Collection

Krueger (1994) offered several steps in gathering data that were followed in this research. Questions are to be sequenced to allow maximum insight among the participants. The moderator provides time during the interview for focus group members to become comfortable with the questions, listen to each other, and assure that everyone has had a chance to offer their perspective. The data is recorded via audiotape and videotape. Additionally, important themes are coded by categories that develop from the responses.

When preparing to report focus group findings, I committed to viewing the videotapes, listening to the audiotapes, and reading the transcripts. Following video, audio, and transcript analysis I coded the data. Data assembled through codes is known as axial coding. The coded responses and categorized findings were discussed with the moderator to assure that contextually appropriate meanings were being communicated.

An effective moderator and groups that are homogeneous maximized the depth of data for this study.

Data Analysis

“The primary objective of the focused interview is to elicit as complete a report as possible of what was involved in the experience of a particular situation” (Fiske et al., 1990, p. 21). Research findings should be presented in a manner that is clear and

understandable. “The first step in almost all approaches to the analysis of focus group data is to have the entire interview transcribed” (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 103).

There are two recognized steps in focus group analysis.

A mechanical one and an interpretive one (Seidel & Clark, 1984). The mechanical part involves physically organizing and subdividing the data into meaningful segments. The interpretive part involves determining criteria for organizing the textual data into analytically useful subdivisions (in essence coding the data) and the subsequent search for patterns within and between these subdivisions to draw substantively meaningful conclusions. (Morgan, 1993, pp. 44-45)

This study includes the analysis of data that was coded and reported as findings from participant responses.

Prior to reporting findings, I transcribed the audiotapes and watch the videotapes. It is the researcher’s responsibility to code the data and analyze “for emergent isomorphous themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989; Krueger, 1994, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1994; Wolcott, 1990)” (Shoaf, 2000, p. 60). Following audiotape transcription and data coding, I conducted a review of the findings with the moderator. If needed, the moderator conducted member checking with participants to clarify the intent of responses. “Member checking is the process of verifying the accuracy of research descriptions with members of the group from which data was collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989; Krueger, 1994, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Weiss,

1998)” (Shoaf, 2000, p. 61). I have in my report clarified the intended meanings of the responses with the moderator so as not to provide findings that were inaccurate.

Perspective of the Researcher

My perspective as a researcher is grounded in postpositivism with a desire to challenge and expand the new paraology of the postmodern. It is my intent to challenge the metanarratives of the present through the infusion of voices of oppressed people.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) defined postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. xxiv). The postmodern position by Lyotard is based on metanarratives, which can be explained as moving from the grand narrative of the modern perspective to the smaller narrative and paraology of the postmodern. The postmodern finds paraology infusing society with new knowledge from a larger population. I have sought to gain perspectives that may result in more effective services being provided to children living in poverty.

According to Lather, “Lyotardian paraology is that ‘which refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable’ via the constant search for new ideas and concepts that introduces dissensus into consensus” (as cited in Gitlin, 1994, p. 43). The basis of knowledge in the modern era was found in the grand narrative whereas the definition of knowledge of the postmodern can be found in the discourses of paraology. A further change from modern to postmodern can be found in the shift from knowledge being based on superstition and faith to science (modern) that does not deal with ontological issues. The researcher accepts faith but views knowledge as a scientific and physical reality. Furthermore,

Science does not expand by means of the positivism of efficiency. The opposite is true: working on a proof means searching for and ‘inventing’ counterexamples, in other words, the unintelligible; supporting an argument means looking for a ‘paradox’ and legitimating it with new rules in the games of reasoning. (Lyotard, 1979, p. 54)

I believe that knowledge has been primarily based in metanarratives and can be furthered through the study of discourse and paralogy.

It is the goal of this researcher to query the dominant generalized discourse of society concerning federal and local poverty-based programs by emphasizing the perspectives of particular parents with children living in varied conditions of poverty.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Overview

I chose not to include a traditional chapter IV in this dissertation. Rather for purposes of reporting data from the interviews, I included four separate appendices with complete transcripts from each focus group. Clarity of participant perspectives can be gained from the complete transcripts because interview responses are presented in actual context. I have included only portions of the interview data as they are relevant to the results of this research project.

Focus group interviews were scheduled for parents from four demographic poverty groups. The groups included parents from generational urban poor, generational rural poor, situational urban poor, and situational rural poor circumstances. My intention was to have parents attend demographically homogenous interviews, thus participants were invited to a meeting that would create groups with similar poverty circumstances. The moderator soon informed me that several participants would not be able to attend the demographically assigned interview and as a result, would not be participating in the study. Rather than losing participants, I asked the moderator to invite participants to interview sessions that were not demographically homogeneous.

When transcribing the interview audiotapes, participants were identified according to poverty circumstance by names beginning with a common first letter even if they did not participate in an interview that was demographically appropriate. Parents from generational urban poor circumstances were identified with names beginning with the letter A, situational poor rural parents were identified with names beginning with the

letter B, generational poor rural participants were identified with names beginning with the letter C, and situational urban poor parents were identified with names beginning with the letter D. The transcript for the first interview group with 2 generational poor urban parents can be found in Appendix A, the transcript for the second interview group which included 2 situational poor urban parents and 1 situational poor rural parent can be found in Appendix B, the transcript for the third interview group which included 3 generational poor rural parents and 1 situational poor rural parent is Appendix C, and the fourth interview transcript with 1 situational poor urban parent is Appendix D. The appendices include complete transcripts from the interviews and effectively provide the participants' perspectives.

I chose to organize this chapter into 5 primary sections. The initial section includes interview results from my data collection that have been previously recognized by other researchers. Those data from this study will be related to some of that existing research. The second section provides a review of group results that need to be addressed in school districts. All findings in this section are not specific to my school district. The concerns expressed in this section are worthy of discussion for all schools. Thirdly, I presented interview results that need further research verification. Parents discussed programs and offered alternative suggestions that need further research to determine if they would help the academic achievement of children. Following the discussion of data in terms of further research, I offered my general observations of this study in relation to the results. Finally, I offer conclusions that include my recommendations for further research.

Findings that Reinforce Previous Studies

This section includes findings from my research interviews that have been previously noted by other researchers. The results are significant and are prefaced with parental perspectives followed by research that supports the findings. My first finding related to current research was the call for communication between agencies and poverty-based program participants.

Collaboration is Needed Between Schools and Agencies

A primary purpose of this research project was to create a means of communication with parents that have children participating in poverty-based programs that were designed to improve academic achievement. The attempt to develop an open-line of communication included establishing a collaborative relationship with a social worker from a local public agency. The need to collaborate with a social worker was sought because I did not have an established relationship with parents that have children participating in poverty-based programs. The social worker had established relationships with these parents and was willing to serve as the moderator for the focus group interviews. The collaborative relationship was successful in gaining participants for the interviews that were willing to share their perspectives.

Research by Buttery and Anderson (1999) urged school administrators to establish clear communication with parents. I needed to collaborate with a social worker to gain parental perspectives on programs for their children. I felt this collaboration was needed because parents may provide pertinent information about poverty-based programs offered to improve student academic performances. Parents possess knowledge of poverty-based program value because they interact on a daily basis with their children.

University of Maryland President Freeman A. Hrabowski (2003) stated, To ensure the success of minority students in math and science, K-12 educators must find ways of engaging parents and families. We should listen carefully to the voices of successful minority students to learn what factors made a positive difference in their lives. (p. 45)

Educators and parents may gain valuable information from interview participants that share how programs foster academic achievement for children. I felt that parents had the greatest knowledge of the academic needs for their children, thus I needed to gain their perspectives on the value of poverty-based programs. Educational programs for children may be advanced if meaningful communication between school personnel and parents can be fostered through a collaborative relationship between school administrators and social service agencies.

The collaborative relationship was validated during the focus group interviews when parents stated they enjoyed participating in the meetings. The collaborative relationship with the social worker fostered interviews with open dialogue by all participants. Parents did not discuss any concerns or animosity about participating in the interview with the moderator. Rather parents were comfortable with the interview and felt their perspectives may change existing programs and influence the development of new services. Angela stated, "I helped somebody if not at least myself by participating in the interview." Whereas Denise shared, "It feels good to get your opinion out about something instead of just keeping your mouth shut and not being able to say it because nobody is going to listen." Denise agreed, "That is what it is for. It might just help." Parents wanted to help their children, themselves, and other program participants. I

believe that parents felt comfortable during the interview sessions and would be willing to participate in future meetings because of their established relationship with the moderator.

Communication Between Parents and Children is Important

Coupled with the need for educators to gain parental perspectives was the value of communication between parents and their children. The communicative relationship between parents and their children was valuable. The interviews provided opportunities for parents to talk about their children and in doing so, they realized the value of their personal communication. As administrators need to listen to program participants, parents need to listen to their children. Angela shared the following conversation that she had with her daughter. The dialogue is important because Angela discussed the need for communicating and listening to her daughter.

I had a conversation with my daughter. It was a word that was said on T.V. and I am trying to think what word it was, I do not remember what the word was but I actually said, "What does she mean by that?" My daughter explained it to me, so I mean it was just like I benefit out of it because I learned what that word meant and she helped me, like I said with a whole new word. I was kind of lost in that word. I kept on saying, "What does she mean by that?" and she said, "Mommy that means this, this, that, you know like when that," and I said, "Oh, okay," so I think I benefit, she gets smarter, she can help me with those little points, because I got out of grade school when I was in seventh grade; she is already in seventh grade and likes school and she plans to keep going.

The conversation between Angela and her daughter exemplified the need for communication between parents and their children. Angela was able to benefit from the education her daughter received and this experience may foster future collaboration regarding academic concerns.

Communication between parents and their children was important but appeared to be limited on several academic topics because parents did not possess the needed confidence to help their children. For example, Cindy stated, “I do not understand this math” and Connie cited her inability to help with math homework because she had been out of school for 25 years. Parents lacked the necessary confidence to help their children with academic problems. Parents supported Title I programs, preschool services, before and after school tutoring, and other academic programs outside of the typical school day and year because they did not believe their help would improve the academic performances of their children. Parents clearly called for programs developed by schools that would help them assist their children with homework.

Title I and Academic Programs Help Students

Next, parents discussed the need for strong academic programs that would directly help their children with academic concerns. University of Wisconsin-Madison assistant professor Geoffrey D. Borman (2003) stated,

Evidence indicates that closing the (achievement) gap must begin with a strong educational foundation of high-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten programs. Preschool intervention can help close the achievement gaps and can have important long-term impacts on students through middle school, high school, and even into adulthood (Barnett, 1995). (p. 50)

As noted by Connie and Cindy, parents may be intimidated or embarrassed of their personal academic ability and would prefer not to offer help to their children. Parents valued educational programs from school personnel because this created a feeling of security by knowing that children were receiving help from a certified teacher that possessed necessary academic skills to foster student learning. Title I programs provided learning opportunities for children that may not be possible with whole class instruction or from parents at home. Bonita shared that Title I helped her daughter whereas Carla stated academic programs are valued because, “It is hard when you are home by yourself and you have little ones and they want help and they are all in different grades.” Parents from each interview group expressed a desire for new programs to support academic success for their children. The programs most sought by participants were those taught by teachers.

Parents valued Title I tutoring programs and called for additional educational services to be developed by school administrators. Parents felt schools were the most prepared to provide educational assistance for their children, and a certified teacher should provide the instruction or tutoring. Borman (2003) suggests he found that Title I helped students in two ways.

First our meta-analysis suggests that the students served by Title I clearly would have been worse off academically without the program. Second, the fact that the National Assessment of Educational Progress data show such tremendous national progress demonstrates that educational inequality can be overcome in a relatively short period of time when new policies and funding sources are targeted toward improving education and other services for disadvantaged students. (p. 50)

Although all parents did not lack the necessary confidence to help their children with schoolwork, additional programs were sought. When discussing additional academic programs Annette clarified the perspective that some parents could help teachers during the school day by volunteering to tutor students. Carla supported Annette and additionally called for organized academic programs outside of typical school hours. Carla felt that “help should be available before school for those parents that can bring their kids in early, come in 45 minutes earlier; if it is not teacher A then it is teacher B, okay it may not be your regular math teacher that is helping you. It may be another math teacher that is helping you.” Becky wanted to see help for her children during the school day. She commended a program that worked in her daughter’s school. “I know with my little girl, they have a child, she is in third grade and they have a second grader that comes in and does their math with the third grade. She is like, ‘Oh, I am going to work hard so I can go up with the next grade.’” By allowing a child to work in another classroom, schools were able to offer an advanced academic program without spending additional fiscal resources. Regardless of the instructor, parents felt their children should have opportunities for additional instruction to improve academic performance. Donna expressed a similar view to Carla when stating tutoring should occur “either after school, like right after school for maybe an hour or at a library that would have a special room closed off” for students to study.

Clearly parents wanted after school tutoring and academic enrichment programs that furthered academic success for their children. After school academic tutoring and additional academic programs have merit according to Lucy Friedman (2003), President of The After-School Corporation. Lucy states, “What after-school programs should do is

increase students' general knowledge of the world. Education is more than just schooling. The more you know, the better a student you'll be" (p. 81). Regardless of poverty circumstance, parents wanted their children to have opportunities to improve academic performances.

Coupled with the need for before and after school tutoring and academic enrichment offerings, Annette and Angela expressed a strong desire for summer education programs. Summer education can be as valuable as before and after school academic programs. Parents felt educational gains could be furthered during summer months through a variety of programs. Borman (2003) provided support for summer education when reporting, "To stop the summer learning slide and to help prevent the widening of the achievement gap, poor and minority students need more opportunities to extend their learning through the summer months" (p. 52). Parents do not want their children to regress academically during summer months. Members from each interview group expressed the need for extended academic programs coupled with a summer enrichment program. Closing the achievement gap may be realized through additional educational opportunities for disadvantaged children.

Student Behavior and Food Insecurity

Parents expressed a concern that some of their children experienced behavioral problems while at school. Dr. J. Larry Brown, Executive Director for the Center on Hunger and Poverty, cited children that experience food insecurity "suffer greater rates of behavioral disorders" (Center on Hunger and Poverty, Brandeis University, 2002, p. 4). Behavioral and social problems were a concern for parents. Connie described her son as a child that acted as the "class clown to get everybody's attention." Her son's behavioral

problems may have been a result of hunger. Connie felt NSLP and SBP helped her son by providing nutritious meals. Furthermore, she felt the meals helped her son with his behavioral problems. The behavioral problems described by Connie were consistent with the problems experienced by children suffering from food insecurity. Although Connie offered additional reasons for her son's behavioral problems, she discussed with passion the value of the meal programs for her children.

Additionally parents discussed the concern that their children needed meal programs to avoid feeling hungry or even pain during school hours. Angela related her feelings on food security when stating if hungry she does not "think right" and children "have to have a meal" during the school day to help them concentrate on academic subjects. Angela noted that not all children get 3 meals a day. Carla verified Angela's comments when stating,

Honestly for me if it were not for the programs, the free lunch, free and reduced meals, they probably would not have lunch, seriously. I mean it gets that bad sometimes. I lost my job recently so we went from two incomes to one income and it is just not there, it is just not there. So if they did not provide that, yes, there probably would be a lot of times they would not eat at all.

Parents felt that hunger might cause physical pain and force students to lose focus during instructional times. The meal programs helped children with their academic pursuits.

School Start Time Challenged

Another change based on prior research was the call for a later start time to the school day. Although only one participant addressed this concern, prior research supports the parental viewpoint. Donna felt that school administrators should consider starting

school later in the morning for middle and high school students. Donna expressed that her daughter's greatest challenge with school was the starting time because "getting to school in the morning" was very difficult. Research has suggested that a later start to the school day is beneficial to adolescents.

The National Sleep Foundation, a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public understanding of sleep and sleep disorders, urges educators to adopt later start times for middle and high schools so teens can get more sleep in the morning. They also recommend schools create a sleep-education curriculum to assist students in learning about the consequences of sleep deprivation and the importance of sleep to their overall health. (Finger, 2001, Introductory section, ¶ 1 and 2)

Donna provided a view that was supported by current research. Educators need to listen to parents and explore current sleep research to determine the value of starting school later for students.

Participant Demographic Findings

Results based on prior research were also found in demographic groups. Situational and generational poverty groups provided insight into two areas that impacted the academic achievement of their children. Payne (2001) reported situational poor individuals and families often have more resources than generationally poor families when dealing with problems. Resources may include access to food, educational attainment, and money. Families and individuals from situational poverty have experiences outside of poverty and often possess education, work skills, and experiences that are needed to gain employment. Children from situational poverty circumstances also

possessed skills that were prevalent in their non-disadvantaged peers. Denise stated, “I never had to worry about Title I or nothing because my kids were okay.” Her children had the academic skills necessary to achieve without additional help. Whereas Bonita discussed moving from a community that she felt provided a minimal education to a school system that provided academic support for challenging work. Being situationally poor and at the time above poverty living conditions, Bonita had the resources to move her family to a community that she felt provided a better education. Bonita described the educational difference between the two communities when stating her new community “has a much better school system.” The new school system placed her daughter in honors courses because she had “straight A’s” from the former school. Bonita felt that her daughter “struggled and struggled and struggled rather than having a placement test to see where kids belong,” the tests might have been used to determine academic strengths and weaknesses. But the new school placed Bonita’s daughter in challenging courses and then provided academic support to help her achieve. Bonita did feel that over time her daughter achieved the performance required at the new school system. This realization is very important because clearly the opportunity to attend a school system with a challenging curriculum is advantageous for children, although not all parents have the resources to move their family. Parents valued the academic resources offered by school systems with rigorous curriculums because children achieved higher academic standards.

Furthermore, situationally poor parents expressed that Title I tutoring services provided a feeling of security. Becky felt that Title I services helped her son learn to read and helped her as a parent.

He needed that one on one time and for me having three kids and when they come it is like, sit down because you have to do your homework because you have to eat because you have to go here and there. And so for me to sit down and try to help each one it gets really, really stressful. So to have somebody else to be able to sit down with him and help him one on one like he needed, it helped so much.

The tutoring services helped children during school hours and relieved stress from Becky at home because she had to take care of her younger children. Additionally, Bonita noted that Title I tutoring provided her daughter with the necessary help which allowed her to achieve grade level performances. Although her daughter struggled initially with reading, Title I tutoring provided help.

Now she is able to keep up with the schools and get her work done and she gets decent grades and before that without Title I she would have not known how to use cursive and she would not be reading up to level and she would not have gotten the grades.

Situational poor parents shared experiences of how tutoring programs helped their children. Parents viewed the programs as short-term solutions to academic problems. Situational poor parents did not discuss programs as long-term but rather as a means to solving an immediate problem.

Payne (2001) reported generational poor families might not have the supports necessary to break the cycle of poverty and they hoped that schools or agencies would provide the resources necessary to help their children succeed academically.

Generationally poor parents in my study stated schools should be responsible for providing new and additional programs to help their children. Annette, Angela, Cindy,

and Connie felt teachers would be the most appropriate selection for tutoring children and the services should take place at school. Convincingly, parents agreed that school personnel were the most prepared to develop and facilitate new academic and social programs for their children.

Generational poor parents did not speak of tutoring or educational programs in terms of being limited time offerings for their children. Parents did not mention they felt their children would leave a tutoring program as was discussed by situational poor parents. Also, generational poor parents did not discuss how they could help their children with academic problems. The confidence to help their children academically or the view that a program would be short-term was not emphasized during the interviews by generational poor parents.

Results that Need to be Addressed by School Districts

Results from the interviews provided findings that can be addressed in my school district as well as in other school systems. Although several of the discussed circumstances were not specific to the district in which I work, the findings need to be shared with school administrators so that poverty-based program changes may be considered. These findings provided perspectives calling for changes to current programs that would be helpful for children.

Equal and Supportive Treatment of Children is Needed

School personnel should not disparately treat students in a negative manner because they receive NSLP or SBP meals. Donna stated at her child's school if a student received a free lunch they were forced to go to the back of the lunch line and wait until students that packed their lunches bought a drink and the students paying full price

purchased their meal. This practice is disgraceful and should not be tolerated. All children should be treated with dignity regardless of the cost of their meal. The negative stigma created when children are forced to the back of a line because they receive a free or reduced priced meal can only be damaging to their self-esteem.

It seems appropriate in terms of the objectives of federally subsidized programs that school make arrangements to provide both NSLP and SBP meals for children that are eligible. It has been noted that some school administrators are using budgetary excuses as reasons for not offering meal programs to children. If children are eligible to receive a free or reduced priced meal, school personnel need to work on strategies to provide the programs. Children that are eligible for the meal programs may not have other opportunities during the day to eat. The opportunity to eat breakfast prior to the start of school may not be available at home because food is not available. If a family cannot provide food for breakfast it is very likely that food for packed lunches will not be available as well. School administrators must make every effort to provide NSLP and SBP meals for eligible children.

Parents overwhelmingly express positive views for NSLP and SBP meals for their children. A variety of reasons were provided by parents concerning the value of free and reduced priced meals. But, parents did not want their children to be embarrassed because they participated in the meal programs. Connie stated, "I know that they are probably going to be embarrassed as they get older" if they are forced to use a ticket for NSLP and SBP meals. Administrators need to develop methods to protect the privacy of children. Children should not be identified by peers and potentially embarrassed because they receive NSLP and SBP meals. In the data I collected parents called for schools to

computerize their accounting systems so that students could use a school card or pin number when purchasing meals. Becky remembers being in school and looking at people using a lunch ticket which meant their meal was free. “They stood out because they had a lunch ticket.” She added,

Kids, they can be very cruel when they know you get a free lunch because your parents do not make any money. But now, like I said, if you make it into a system where other kids do not have to know anything about it; like we came from (community), it was all computers, nobody knew anything. It was all computers! Each kid had a pin number and it is entered into the computer and it came off an account. If the federal money was put in there, or if parents put money in there, then the note went home when the account was empty. That worked really, really well.

A common solution to avoid stigmatizing and embarrassing children that receive free or reduced priced meals was offered by parents from each group. The opportunity to use a computerized accounting system with all children having a common card was very appealing to parents. The meal programs have great value to parents and their children, thus school administrators must make accommodations to maximize program participation and to avoid unnecessary embarrassment for participants.

Along with the need to protect the privacy rights of children, NSLP and SBP programs need to be tailored for participants. By tailoring, meals and eating times should be offered to meet the needs of the diverse student population. Debbie did not feel school personnel provided adequate time for children to receive and eat a meal. If children and families depend on NSLP and SBP meals, school personnel must provide adequate time

for eating. Denise agreed with this perspective because she felt a late arriving school bus might force a child to miss his or her only opportunity for breakfast. School administrators need to organize time so that children can be served their meals and have adequate time to eat those meals.

Denise also wanted to see a variety of foods for children that receive NSLP and SBP meals. According to Denise, there are many “vegetarians out there and they have no choices and a lot of these kids are really picky or allergic to something.” Similarly Bonita felt that her daughter who was a vegetarian did not receive any accommodations from lunch program personnel. Bonita stated, “give her more than a choice of either cheese pizza or salad. Like she said, ‘if I take salad with something that is there, it is usually gross but if I take a regular salad then I do not get anything else but salad and my drink,’ and she says that is decent but it is not really her taste.” A variety of food choices need to be offered each day for vegetarians and children allergic to certain types of foods. School personnel, if we are serious about creating academic opportunities for success, have an obligation to provide nutritious meals with variety so that students will eat.

Parents with children participating in the NSLP and SBP were not asking for extensive selections or unreasonable accommodations. Parents expressed a need for schools to provide nutritious meals, with variety, and to give attention to special dietary needs. Schools should provide nutritious meals to vegetarians as well as children that are allergic to certain types of foods such as peanut butter.

Expand Title I Services

Parents also expressed a need for expanded Title I services. Again parents did not call for services that were exorbitant. Rather, parents valued Title I tutoring because the

educational instruction improved academic performances by their children. Carla felt Title I was very important. She said, "I am not in a position to teach them and I thank God that they have these programs available so that they can maybe learn more than what I got from school and go farther in life than I did." Parents valued tutoring and additional academic programs for their children.

Cindy provided her perspective on how Title I programs could better serve her child. "I feel that the following year when a student moves," the teacher should be notified and services continued without interruption. Cindy did not feel that a break in Title I services should occur for children. Rather, parents should be sent a letter asking if they want their child to continue participating in the tutoring program during the next school year. Cindy felt if parents wanted their children to continue receiving Title I services, the school should provide the opportunity.

Additional recommendations were made by parents calling for Title I programs in every grade from kindergarten through 12th. Parents did not feel that class sizes allowed teachers to work in small groups with students, thus not fostering the educational skills necessary for their children. Again school administrators must not use budgetary restraints as an excuse not to provide educational services for children. Although schools may not be able to provide K-12 tutoring in all core subjects, children should have an opportunity to receive help to assure academic success.

Results that Need Further Verification

The intention of this research project was to gain perspectives from parents concerning programs that increased the academic performance of their children. I feel this voice is missing in current research. Although I am not suggesting that all parents

with children participating in poverty-based programs have never been asked to provide their opinions about a program. Rather I conducted this study to gain opinions on specific programs that were designed to help the academic achievement of children. Parents were provided an opportunity to openly discuss the merits of school related programs with a social worker that already knew their needs for food, clothing, and counseling. The established relationship between the social worker and parents was important for open and honest dialogue in each interview. Passionate responses were evident on the videotape, and the moderator possessed the necessary skills to inject additional questions to further an answer or participant's response.

The moderator was not a school employee; her focus during the interviews did not reflect a teacher, school nurse, or school guidance counselor. The moderator did not force conversation on specific poverty-based programs such as WIC, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, or the Food Stamp Program. Conversations did not delve into Medicaid programs or other related healthcare services. Perhaps if a school employee conducted the interviews, greater emphasis would have been given to specific academic programs or specific health care programs.

The moderator did not discourage conversations about WIC, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, and the Food Stamp Program. Interestingly, only Cindy mentioned the benefits of Healthy Start for her daughter, although all participants had previous experiences with the benefits. Healthy Start benefits provided medical insurance for Cindy's daughter that otherwise would not have been possible due to her single household income. Cindy stated, "I had a urine infection about a month ago and there was nothing I could do about it" Cindy could not afford medical insurance nor could she

pay for a visit to the doctor. Health insurance is not fiscally possible in many instances for low-income parents. The limits on a family budget and the need for federal benefits were clarified when Cindy went on to state, “I know the reduced lunch is only 40 cents but there is only me in the household and my daughter and we are trying to work and pay the rent and utilities and I cannot even get medical for myself, so yes, it is a real struggle.” Interview participants possessed knowledge about programs such as WIC, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, and Food Stamp Programs but group discussions did not highlight the value of these programs for those children or parents. Further research is needed to determine if these health programs have a direct influence on the academic performance of children.

Additional focus group interviews moderated by school personnel may identify programs that help children and their parents. The new research focus may engage parents to determine how their children’s academic performance is improved as a result of participating in poverty-based programs. This research did gain parental perspectives on the NSLP, SBP, and Title I programs but not on other established services.

Further research is needed to determine how to improve the self-esteem of parents with children living in poverty. Parents expressed a variety of reasons for not helping their children with homework. Although parents such as Becky mentioned that helping with homework was difficult because of childcare responsibilities, other parents simply did not possess the confidence to help their children. As previously mentioned Cindy and Connie felt they were out of school too long and did not have the skills necessary to help their children with mathematics homework. Research must seek to help parents gain confidence to support their children with homework or attempts must be made to develop

programs that will help parents gain necessary skills to assist their children. Interaction between parents and their children is an excellent means for modeling a positive image of parents helping children that may be valuable for future generations.

Further research is needed to determine how collaborative efforts between school and social service agencies may gain parental perspectives about academic programs for their children. I gained perspectives from parents about their participation in this study. I sought these perspectives because evaluations concerning poverty-based programs such as the NSLP, SBP, and Title I often use quantitative measures to evaluate program value. The typical quantitative evaluations measure the number of eligible adults and children for a program compared to the number of people served, whereas this study utilized focus group interviews as a means to determine program value from parental perspectives. In this research, as evident in the following passages, parents felt their participation in the interview was valuable.

Annette stated,

I love it, because it is a freedom of speech, maybe these ideas that we were talking about right here, that tape goes on to somebody and somebody in a high position. They say, well, you know what, maybe this is a good idea, maybe we should do this, and I feel that when it comes to our children, we should participate in everything there is because, okay, we had our opportunity and life is not getting any better, it is more of a struggle nowadays and there needs to be changes and our voices need to be heard all for the kids.

Annette appeared pleased on the videotape and expressed a positive perspective about participating in the interview. She felt her participation in the interview served as a means

to communicate with people that organized programs for her children and herself. Angela offered a similar view when stating,

I feel great because sometimes we learn from each other's ideas. We all think different. That is what makes everybody different. I can feel, I felt like I was free to talk; there was no right or wrong answer. I am sure I helped with something, somebody or something with how I felt, maybe somebody is out there thinking, something like me.

Angela and Annette both provided perspectives they helped people that participated in poverty-based programs by offering their ideas.

Debbie and Denise also favored participating in this interview process. Debbie stated,

I think this is great because it has given them things to think of. This is what is going to help. Because they are going to get people's opinions and maybe it will do something for it for the positive, okay. I mean this will help and everything.

Debbie offered a perspective that she was helping herself and other program participants through her participation in this interview. Additionally, Denise stated, "it feels good to get your opinion out about something instead of just keeping your mouth shut and not being able to say it because nobody is going to listen."

Connie and Becky also agreed that their participation was a positive experience. Connie stated, "It was not bad at all. I learned a lot." The process of focus group interviews allowed for interaction and the building on ideas and perspectives from other participants. The opportunity to interact with people of similar circumstances generated a feeling within the group that resulted in greater details being offered for each question.

The individual interview with Donna produced a positive response as well. Donna responded favorably to participating in the interview, “because it is an idea that maybe somebody will be able to do something.”

The positive responses that I found provided the basis for future research on the value of collaborative relationships between schools and social service agencies. If school personnel do not have an established relationship with parents that have children participating in poverty-based programs then open invitations to focus group interviews are not likely to be successful. School administrators such as myself can gain valuable perspectives from parents, thus additional research on collaborative interview relationships is needed.

General Observations by the Researcher

My collaborative relationship with a social worker was valuable for this research project. Parents were willing to share their views about poverty-based programs with the social worker because they had an established relationship. This research collaboration was successful and clearly may alter an existing problem for school administrators that seek parental perspectives on poverty-based programs. The breakdown in gaining parental perspectives by school administrators is typically the result of non-existing established relationships with parents. The development of established relationships between school administrators and parents generally cannot be fostered in a short period of time. Thus collaborative ventures with social service organizations and the like, serves as a valuable avenue for gaining perspectives that otherwise may be missed.

Even after collaborating with a social worker, gaining participants for the interviews was challenging. The social worker invited 23 parents to attend one of the

focus group interviews. Of the 23 parents, 19 indicated that they would attend the focus group interview. Ten of the 19 participants actually attended a focus group interview. My past experiences with Title I parent meetings serves as a basis for believing that fewer parents would have participated in these interviews if the social worker had not served as the moderator for the groups. I, like many other school administrators, do not have the necessary pre-established relationship with parents that have children living in poverty, to gain their participation in a focus group interview.

Furthermore, parents valued programs designed to help the academic performance of their children. But programs helping children succeed academically are not always tutoring or instructionally based. Rather, children from low-income families may not have the opportunity to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For some students the SBP and NSLP were the only meals they receive the entire day. School districts not offering NSLP and SBP meals because of financial considerations should reconsider their purpose. Schools should help children, and if students are eligible for NSLP and SBP meals, they should be provided. At a minimum schools should offer simple breakfast foods that meet RDA requirements such as cereal and milk, Pop-Tarts and juice, muffin and milk, and the like. Children and families depend on the meals, thus schools must offer both SBP and NSLP meals.

Educationally, parents favored extended school days and school years for their children. Parents offered numerous reasons for wanting before and after school tutoring and academic programs for their children. Parents desired before or after school tutoring and daycares because they needed a safe place to take their children when they went to work while additional academic programs would help children in all learning areas as

mentioned by Lucy Friedman (2003). Because of limited family fiscal resources, parents were not able to provide their children with educational opportunities such as trips to museums and zoos, thus a summer academic program was viewed as a valuable service to children. Regardless of time, parents wanted programs to further support the academic performance of their children.

This study provided an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the value of collaboration between schools and social service agencies. Both schools and social agencies share a common purpose of helping children and in some circumstances parents as well. The need for open and honest communication must be sought so that all children will receive academic benefits as sought by various poverty-based programs. This research may serve as a successful model for future collaboration efforts involving schools.

Recommendations

Poverty-based program administrators from school and community agencies need to establish an open line of communication with program participants. If administrators evaluate poverty-based programs with quantitative measures rather than the qualitative perspectives of parents that actively participate in the programs, they may not gain a clear understanding of how programs impact children and parents at the local level.

The following recommendations and comments are intended for school administrators and social service agencies:

1. Poverty-based program agencies and school administrators need to seek more engaged and effective opportunities to collaborate in the administration and evaluation of poverty-based program;

2. Focus groups and targeted interviews may serve the goal more effectively than all-calls, letters, parent councils, etc., when seeking parent perspectives;
3. Collaborate with agencies and other organizations that have established relationships with parents that are being sought for a research project or program evaluation;
4. Develop services for children and adults that are based on or sensitive to perspectives from program participants;
5. Program administrators need to maximize the benefit of programs to help parents help their children. Optimal program value may not be achieved without interaction between administrators and program participants. A local perspective must be gained so that programs can be fostered or altered to benefit participants;
6. Programs should be maximized to help children and emerge from local needs. Parents must express how they feel programs are valuable, or not, for their children. Programs should be developed or altered to help children and their parents;
7. Provide safe environments for participant interview sessions to occur. Seek open and honest communication with program participants when conducting focus group or targeted interviews;
8. Understand the rationale and intended outcomes of poverty-based programs. A thorough understanding and shared coordination of all poverty-based programs will allow administrators and social workers the opportunity to gain a

comprehensive understanding of perspectives from parents concerning programs for their children;

9. Program administrators must seek opportunities to protect the identity of poverty-based program participants.

Further research is needed to determine:

1. What are parental viewpoints on the value of WIC, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, and the Food Stamp Programs for children and families;
2. If collaborative efforts between schools and social service agencies will serve as the means for gaining parental perspectives that have been absent from prior research;
3. Which poverty-based programs are most valuable for directly improving student academic performance;
4. Which social programs are most valued by children and their parents;
5. What the specific needs are of different types of economic poverty; e.g., generational urban, generational rural, situational urban, and situational rural, call for altered programs to serve different needs. Current criteria for poverty program participants are offered at large to parents and children based on national economic average without regard to their circumstances;
6. If schoolwide Title I services are more or less valuable in helping children and their parents as compared to Title I targeted assistance programs;
7. Would different educational perspectives have been expressed from interview participants if the moderator were a school guidance counselor, school nurse, or teacher?

Research Process for Administrators

Parents that participated in this study expressed favorable perspectives towards the focus group interview process. I believe the positive perspectives are a result of my collaboration with a social worker that served as the interview moderator. The established relationship between the social worker and parents minimized the anxiety of participating in an interview. Because of the established relationship with the social worker parents were very open to the questions and provided personal accounts when sharing information.

Poverty-based program agencies and administrators may take the positive perspectives offered in this research and develop evaluation measures for programs that require or could benefit from parental perspectives. A significant finding in this research was that parents felt their participation in the interview not only helped their families but may also serve to benefit other poverty-based program participants.

The process for developing this type of research technique for administrators and social service agencies can be formalized. First, administrators should identify a program that can be evaluated through perspectives of participants. The identification of a program or series of services will require administrators to read policies and guidelines as related to programs. Developing a comprehensive understanding of program purposes may be beneficial to both administrators and participants. Administrators may not understand the perspectives of participants if a thorough understanding of program procedures and goals are not clear.

Following program identification and research, a series of specific questions should be developed and authenticated by program participants or, in the case of this

research, a social worker. The need for specificity and clarity of questions should not be overlooked. Interview questions need to be understandable, both in language and intent, by the participants. Coupled with the development of interview questions, the administrator should seek a moderator that will be accepted by group participants. The moderator should be familiar with participant circumstances. The effectiveness of focus group interviews can be significantly limited if research questions are ambiguous and if interview participants do not view the moderator as credible.

The interview sessions need to be audiotaped and videotaped. The videotape serves as an excellent resource for the administrator. The opportunity to watch a videotape of the interview allows the administrator to see facial expressions and body language of participants. Passionate responses can be seen in context. Audiotapes should be transcribed so that interview perspectives can be coded and analyzed. Administrators need to analyze transcripts and may need to meet with the moderator to ensure understanding of participant responses.

Findings from the interviews should result from emergent themes. Administrators should not manipulate or extend participant responses to gain answers for questions. Rather, responses should be coded according to isomorphic themes. Findings will be determined through the participants' perspectives.

After determining criteria for interview participants, the moderator and researcher should remain vigilant when establishing groups. Sample populations and participant willingness may be limited. But the validity of the interviews will be eliminated if parents are not open and forthcoming as program participants. Administrators should seek

participants that are relevant to the study and should not accept others into group meetings simply for the sake of enlarging the sample.

Postscript

Focus group interviews provide valuable data for research if information is gained using legitimate procedures as outlined in this dissertation. A researcher should develop a clear purpose for a study that can be communicated to a moderator and interview participants. The moderator for this research provided parents with an overview of the research purpose when she invited them to attend an interview. If a relationship had not existed between the moderator and the participants prior to the interviews, the parental perspectives may not have been as detailed and fewer participants would have attended the interviews.

Parents were assured that their identity would be protected during this study. Thus the moderator and the focus group participants talked in an open and honest manner. One example of participant openness was identified during the second interview session. Dialogue between Denise and the moderator exemplified the incredible relationship between the moderator and the participants. The moderator asked Denise to share her perspective on the greatest difficulty her children faced while at school. The response from Denise was very personal. Denise stated, "I want to say two things, but the one I am not going to say. No, the way my kids were treated by what their father had." The moderator furthered Denise's comment with "no one outside of us, they may not know so I mean that is up to you; what you care to say, honey" which created a safe feeling allowing Denise to share that her children were greatly mistreated because their father died of AIDS. Denise stated "that the teachers, the students, the parents; they should have

a class to teach about this (AIDS) because my kids were treated like shit.” As evident on the videotape, Denise passionately expressed personal information during the interview because she had a relationship with the moderator and other group participants. Only after watching the videotape was I able to see Denise’s angry facial expressions and clenched fists when sharing the disturbing treatment her children endured. I feel that passion and honesty were generated during the interviews because of the established relationship between the moderator and these parents.

Parents attending the interview sessions provided valuable perspectives concerning poverty-based programs for their children and themselves. Although the moderator did not pursue a communicative dialogue about WIC, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, and the Food Stamp Program, she was able to gain perspectives about other programs that were helpful. The relationship between the moderator and parents was beneficial, although a school employee such as a guidance counselor, school nurse, or teacher may have served as the moderator for the interviews and perhaps gained further perspectives on school programs. Although, I believe a school employee would not have had the relationship with participants and the information gained would have been limited.

As previously stated, parents were provided lunch or dinner during the meeting and offered transportation and childcare for their attendance. The moderator mailed a letter to eligible interview participants and followed with a telephone call to seek parent participation in the interviews. If a parent indicated that she would attend the meeting but missed the scheduled session, the moderator called the participant and tried to arrange for

her attendance at an alternate meeting. In several cases, the participants verbally agreed to attend the alternate meeting but failed to show.

I feel that significant efforts were made to gain participants for this study. I also believe there would have been fewer participants if not for the personal relationship the moderator had with the parents. Furthermore, if I had allowed parents to participate in the interviews that did not meet the NSLP minimum requirement, the perspectives offered would not have been from people with a personal understanding of poverty-based programs. I sought to protect the integrity of the study, thus all parents had children participating in the NSLP and had personal knowledge of other poverty-based programs.

As a final note, I was encouraged by the positive perspectives offered from parents about their participation in this study. Administrators and social service agencies need to collaborate and seek greater parental perspectives concerning the value of poverty based programs for children. This study may serve as an example for developing effective research strategies to gain perspectives from participants of programs that are designed to academically help children and assist parents.

I am the federal grants director for the school district in which I work. The information gained from parent perspectives was very enlightening. Participants in this study offered insightful perspectives that provided me with valuable new knowledge for the fostering and development of academic programs for children and parents. My future evaluations of poverty-based programs will be structured to include a collaborative relationship with a social service agency and focus group interview procedures. I know that the established relationship between the social worker and these parents fostered the sharing of perspectives that would not have been offered had myself or another school

administrator moderated the interviews. The collaborative relationship with the social service agency allowed this research project to successfully gain parental perspectives.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Interview 1: 10/4/2003

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school districts do your children attend (what grade are your children in)?

Moderator: We are going to go through these questions that they would like me to ask you. I know that both of you have great opinions, so all I want to know is how you feel. None of these questions count against anybody. I do not want anybody to get nervous about it. What we are trying to do here is get some more information and sometimes the information we give to people makes changes in the programs, and so everything that you say and every opinion that you have is really going to be important, answer as honestly as you can. First of all, we are going to start with kind of a general question, tell me a little bit about yourself, how many children you have and in which school districts they attend. We will start with you, Annette.

Annette: I have two kids. I have one in the 8th grade and I have one in the 10th grade and they go to high school.

Moderator: Okay.

Angela: I have two, two girls.

Moderator: Two girls and Annette you have a girl and a boy.

Annette: I have a girl and a boy.

Moderator: So we have the girls represented well but we have a mom that will represent the boys here, too. I know that all of you have kids that receive the lunch program, am I correct?

Annette: Yes.

Angela: YES.

2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have they participated in the program(s)?

Moderator: Okay, maybe they are in things like I do not know if any of you have kids in the Title I reading or math programs. I do not know if you might have children that are also in the breakfast program, but what we would like to know is do you have kids that participate in any of those federal programs, in the breakfast or the lunch programs? In the reading or math program? Any after school programs that might be federally funded, and if they have participated for a number of years in those programs or is this something new?

Annette: My daughter goes to high school and she is not in the breakfast program. I know she eats lunch at school. I fill out the paperwork and I qualify for low-income. Both of them, they do sports. They are in two sports and they both have been in sports since we have been living in (community) and it has been two years and besides that, they do not go to any after school activity, just sports when they go to practices and play other schools.

Moderator: And how about you Angela?

Angela: See, I just recently moved here from Puerto Rico, so they are just starting up but they are in the lunch program. They are definitely in the lunch

program. They have not really gotten into much because, like I said, I got here in March. School just started, so we are looking into sports.

3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: How do you really feel about your kids participating in these programs? Do you want them to participate? Do you feel anything positively or negatively about those programs?

Annette: Okay, as I read and I see the news I always hear that kids that participate in school sports have a better chance of making it going throughout the school year and finishing school and going on to further education. But honestly what got me a little upset this year was that my daughter wanted to play tennis and because she had one point level lower, they did not let her. They told her, “well maybe in a couple of months after the first semester if you get your first grades” and whatever. Come on! If the kid wants to participate in sports, give them that opportunity no matter if it is one grade level or less. You know why? Because it keeps her from the street! Even though I am the type of mother that you are not going to the street, but not every other mother is like that, so the kid says “I cannot play tennis, I want to do this, well since they won’t let me do this I am going to go to the store, I am going to the street, I am going to hang out at the corner” and I feel it is not fair. I feel that maybe, you let them start and

you tell them, “well you got to keep your grades up in order to continue” and maybe they will make that effort because you gave them a chance, that is the way I feel.

Moderator: Because you said that your children participated in the school lunch program, how do you think that may help or hinder them in their academics?

Annette: I feel that not every parent has money to give their child even if they say that they are not low-income or whatever, every parent does not really have five dollars to give their child some lunch and in order for you to maintain yourself health wise and be able to participate, you have to have something in your stomach, you have to be a little healthy and oh no, I am going to leave because I did not have any lunch today and I do not have time because I am going to be late. It helps them. It helps them keep going.

Moderator: All right, so how about you, Angela? What do you think about the lunch program or the breakfast program?

Angela: I think that it is good because it sort of gives me a security. I would rather have my daughter have lunch in school instead of giving her money and her running to McDonalds and she comes back late, or just getting out of school, just to go get something to eat when I know she can be there all the time. Some kids you give them money and they want to go to Wendy’s and then they will come back late. I want to be sure that my daughter is safe there, that she is eating lunch there and she is there all the time and

not running somewhere out of the school grounds and then coming back and having that interferes with me having to worrying about her security.

Moderator: Oh, I think that is a very interesting point, I have to admit that I had not thought about that myself. I think that is why I love the fact that you can bring up your own opinions here and make sure that you are being heard, so I really, really like that.

Annette: And also, the breakfasts, the breakfast thing is also good because in the morning sometimes we do not have time to make our kids breakfast. And the breakfast is what wakes you up, a full stomach. You got to go to work or we have to go there, we are just not able to make that breakfast and to know that there is somewhere they can go and eat early is wonderful.

Moderator: Okay, all right, good.

Annette: The morning starts with a good breakfast. You do not get cranky because you had something to eat, you had something in your stomach and it is a long way before lunchtime.

Angela: The most important meal is breakfast.

Annette: Yes, that is what I thought.

Moderator: Do your kids tell you anything about the breakfast or the lunches that they get? Do they make complaints? Do they say, “hey wait, we had something really good,” anything that you hear about the content of those breakfasts?

Angela: My daughters actually they never complain. I said, “Did you have a good lunch?” and they say “yes.” Sometimes they won’t eat because they gave that for lunch but they always take something in their bag. They always

bring something in their bag, a banana or a bag of chips or some cookies in a little Zip Lock bag or something, so sometimes when lunch does not go well they just snack on that. But they are pretty much content with what they get served there.

Moderator: Okay, good.

Annette: My kids, especially in high school, yes high school, she usually says that, “Mom, they always give the same thing. It is always the same thing.” And I said, well, because I am the type that when they come home from school dinner is done. You can eat right there and you can say 5:00 or whatever, but it is done, because I do not like, like she says, “Mom I did not eat.” They always get the same thing, so I always have something ready for them.

4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: What benefit or benefits do you see for your children, academically, socially, or some other things as a result of their participation in these programs? Do you see any benefits?

Annette: Oh, I see benefits. I see my kids growing up in a good environment, doing positive things because we came a long way back, we came from New York City and we did not have that and basically kids were not doing anything. I see my kids, like, right now I got (name) playing basketball and that is his goal. He wants to be in the NBA and that gives me hope. He is good so he sees that if I practice here it is going to be okay tomorrow. I

see that in my kids because, like I say, years ago, I have been here for two years and they have been participating, they had nothing, they would come out of school and just sit down and play Nintendo and listen to that crazy rap on T.V. and on their Walkman. Now they are going to practices and I see them learning more and being responsible, and for me that is a good benefit.

Moderator: Well, let me ask you this, Annette. Do you think having the lunch available to them, having the breakfast available to them enables them to be able to carry on after school? In other words, can your children participate because they have the energy?

Annette: They do not have to go home and wait for me to do anything. Like I said, dinner is always ready, but when I come, they could stay there because they did have something to eat and they can continue to function. I think it benefits them a lot to have something where they eat at school and they can keep on going to their practices because it will hold them over for another couple of hours.

Moderator: All right, how about you, Angela?

Angela: Yes, definitely, the other day my daughter was telling me they gave her piano class. They wanted her to take piano classes. She did not want to take it. She is smart. I said, "How can you say you do not like it if you never tried it?" She tried it and she likes it. Now I see her and she looks forward to going to music class. So lunch like I say, if I am hungry I am one that I mean I do not think right so I mean kids have to have a meal and

sometimes, like I said, there are kids that do not get to have a meal at home, three meals a day. Some of them just get one or two and I think that three meals are very important for their thinking and going on in life. Because, I mean, they have the strength, they feel stronger, they have something to eat, they are ready, and they get motivated because when you are hungry you do not get that motivation. I did not eat, maybe I should go home and eat, well no, I can go from here to there because I had a full meal and I am ready to just keep going. So I think it is a good meal.

5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.

Moderator: Thinking about the programs that we have been talking about, the lunch program, the breakfast program, some of the other Title programs that they have in school, math and reading, how do they benefit you?

Annette: Yes I see benefits for me. First of all, they help me financially because I have a part-time job and I get so much of food stamps, which really does not cover the whole month. So they are helping me out by feeding my kids breakfast and lunch and I am not trying, it is not like I am saying that you save but it is two meals that you can keep for Saturday or Sunday or a rainy day. Because, like I said, those food stamps and a part-time job do not make it for the month. So pocket wise and financially it helps me a lot. The benefits right there are good.

Moderator: How about you, Angela?

Angela: I was just thinking about that because the other day I had a conversation with my daughter. It was a word that was said on T.V. and I am trying to think what word it was, I do not remember what the word was but I actually said, “What does she mean by that?” My daughter explained it to me, so I mean it was just like I benefit out of it because I learned what that word meant and she helped me, like I said with a whole new word. I was kind of lost in that word. I kept on saying, “What does she mean by that?” and she said, “Mommy that means this, this, that, you know like when that,” and I said, “Oh, okay,” so I think I benefit, she gets smarter, she can help me with those little points, because I got out of grade school when I was in seventh grade, she likes school and plans to keep going. So I think she benefits. She benefits from it and I do too.

Moderator: Yes, that is a good point.

Angela: I was just thinking, could you imagine me, low-income, having to pack breakfast and lunch? It would have been hard. It is a struggle. Things are so expensive nowadays. It is a struggle. You barely make it. You barely make it because sometimes, I got my little part-time and I got my job and I also run to stores, and get it because it is just not enough; so those school lunches and those Title I programs they do help, they benefit us a lot.

Moderator: All right, thanks for your honesty. That is important.

6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children’s achievement in school? Please explain?

Moderator: Think about this, think about your children and the programs that are offered to them, like the breakfast, the lunch, some of the Title I programs. Do you think that they help to increase any of your children's achievement in school?

Annette: I feel yes. I feel they increase, like they say breakfast is the most important meal and they look forward to going to school because they have these programs and they want to participate in them and they are not worried about are they going to lack something, are they going to be hungry, are they going to lack food. No I think it increases them a lot. I am saying, you know what, I can do this and they probably even invite a friend, oh come on, no I cannot go because I do not have any money, do not worry about it, they feed you, you get fed. You do not have to worry about it because we have lunch. We are going to have lunch. It is not like you have to stay hungry until after practice. Yes, I think it does help them achieve because you have to have a full stomach to achieve if you want to read and continue to go forward.

Angela: I definitely think so because like I say, if I am hungry or my kids are hungry I am sure they got thinking or only thinking about, I did not eat lunch and I am hungry. My stomach is growling and I should get something to eat first, I think so. Yes, definitely it helps them. It sure does.

7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children's performance in school?

Moderator: I am going to put you in charge of these programs. Thinking about the programs and how they are run presently, what changes, if any, would you make to them? Like the lunch program, the breakfast program, anything that you would change because now you are in charge?

Annette: First of all I would change the menu because my daughter says, “Mom they give chicken nuggets,” or whatever you call it. Every day it is the same thing. Okay, I know that the school district is not just one school or two schools, what I think is they should change the menu because, they get benefits because they get the free programs and the free lunches and the free breakfast, but you kind of get tired of having the same thing every day. I know I am one, if you are going to give me pancakes today and tomorrow because I could be hungry the next day and I do not want it, I would change. I would change the menu, honestly put a little more variety, I know that it is healthy food, the sandwiches, the cereal, the milk and whatever, but I would just change the menu.

Angela: I do not think I can answer that because I do not really ask my daughter what she eats. Her (Annette) daughter has told me that they have this everyday or every Thursday is the same thing or because I never really had that point to ask my daughter, “What did you have for lunch? Did you like it? So I cannot really, I could not really comment on that. I am just trying to think what would I change, I mean I do not know how they go about classes or groups or what times and stuff like that. So maybe I guess

I would leave it like it is. I have not had any complaints. Something is going well.

Annette: I would definitely take pop machines out of the cafeteria because I feel that pop is just having them run crazy. And I also feel I have something else, another thought in my mind, like right now my daughter says that they can buy, the kids that can buy, they buy and they can eat in the classroom. I do not think that would be fair either. I would just have either everybody eat in the lunch room and we all eat the same thing and whoever brings lunch from home in a separate side or whatever, it is not like a discrimination, but I feel that has to change, because fine maybe one day I can give my daughter \$5.00.

Moderator: You brought up the term discrimination. Do you think there is discrimination because some children, do they even know that there is a lunch program?

Annette: Yes, I think there is. In a way, I think there is because, my daughter and me have a real good communication and sometimes I can give her a dollar or two once in a blue moon and they sell things. Why should they be selling? Either you eat what is there or you do not eat what is there because not everybody can afford this so you are going to come and give my child as an example a little box of cereal and some milk and a banana, whatever, but then this one over here you are selling these nice bagels, scrambled eggs, that should not be, that should not be because it is just not

fair. If you are going to do this, we are going to get free lunches, you participate in the program that is what it is. That is the way I feel.

Moderator: Angela, do you have anything else?

Angela: No, like I said, I mean, my daughter never complained about lunch or anything and I did not even know that, I mean, they were buying and eating there in the classroom while the other ones were eating down in the lunchroom or wherever. I did not even know about that. I guess I recently got here so the little bit I know I am also learning here by her opinions and how she feels. I am also learning and maybe I need to get more involved and find out some little things. I never actually, like I said knew that they were having people, the kids buying food or selling pop and stuff. I did not even know about that. This is all so new to me.

Annette: I bribed her the other day. She just told me, “Mom can you give me \$2.00 today?” I said, “What do you want \$2.00 for?” She said, “I want to buy, they sell this and this and that and I do not want to be the only one” because the little girl she had, little girls have little wars; clique thing and they all can buy. “But I can give you \$2.00 today but I cannot give it to you tomorrow because I do not have it” like that and I think it is just not fair. They are going to go and buy this and the other ones have to eat whatever and then this child, maybe not my kid or maybe so, is going to say, “You know what? I am not eating that. Why should my friends see that I have to eat that? Why, because I do not have no money. Because we are poor,” because that is the way they see it, because we are poor. It is

totally different, I do not think it is fair. I would just change that! If school districts are going to sell lunch, Title I, or whatever, but none of that special meals for those that can afford it because it is not fair.

8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?

Moderator: What additional or new programs, whether right at your school district, something that the State of Ohio does or the Federal Government started, would you like to see offered to make your children more successful in school? Can you think of anything that should be offered to make kids more successful?

Annette: I would like an after school study for those kids that need help because now basically not every parent can just sit down, like sometimes I get home at 5:00 and sometimes I get home at 9:30 and at 9:30 I do not want to sit down with my kid and help her. I remember years ago when I was in school in New York City, my aunt used to take us to an after school study center. I would truly like, even the public schools here to have an after school study center, so the kids cannot say, “You know what, I do not know how to do this and because I do not know how to do this I am not going to do it.”

Moderator: I think that is a really good idea.

Annette: My mother cannot help me. My mother is working and when she comes home late, well you know what? When report cards come, why didn't you know how to do your homework? Because I did not know, I do not know

how to do that. Maybe if they had an after school study center available for the children. That would be a good one.

Moderator: Angela, I can see your brain going there.

Angela: I think it would be summer school. I think definitely because there are some kids, I mean that we do not have money, a lot of us being low-income do not go to Cedar Point this weekend and go camping, kids I saw this summer were just home all summer. They did not get to go to the beach because their parents work and could not take them to the beach. They could not, they really spent all summer at home and maybe if they had like a summer school program they can go to the zoo, or Botanical Gardens, or study and take a trip on the subject that they are studying and maybe that would get them motivated instead of sitting at home all summer when school is done. Okay and some of them were actually depressed that school was over. I heard a couple of my daughter's friends say, "Oh I hate when summer comes," and I said, "Oh God what are you talking about?" She says, "Because my mom does not take me anywhere, I do not get to go anywhere, at least when school, at least I get to go to school and see my friends and get to do things." So I mean, so I would definitely, summer school definitely for those that cannot afford like I said to go to the beach because their parents, even though summer school, school is over for them, the parents still have to go to work. So summer school would help with them, they are not going to study and just sit there in a room and take the books out. We are going to study about this, and

let's go to a museum and see dinosaurs; is that what you are studying, or whatever, the stars, or whatever you are interested in. But I think, yes, summer school, because like I said I was sad to see a lot of kids at home and they were really upset because school was over and they could not see their friends. They could not go. There was nothing they could do and had to stay home while their parents worked and they would be just so bummed out. They would just like, I mean, I would invite them, "Hey, ask your mom if you want to come over. Can you?" Some of their parents are strict, and say "Oh no, I would rather be safe to know that while I am at work she is at home" and not to have someone hear that there was a car accident or somebody got hurt. So yes, I think summer school because it was really sad to see this bright girl, I mean, she is very bright, very nice, very nice girl, and all summer she just passed it locked up. It was sad, it really was and I could imagine she was not the only one. I am sure there were plenty of other kids that in the summer they cannot do anything.

Moderator: I think those are two great points that a lot of us do not think about. First of all you are listening to your kids, which I think is extremely important. You are listening to other people's children because we stay open. Then you realize, wait a second, yes, studies are going so fast today, the after school program is really a good idea. The summer school tied in with activities and learning. Yes, because right now we do not have to worry about budgets or anything like that. We are just saying these are things that we could think about. I think that is wonderful!

Annette: Are we still in charge?

Moderator: Yes, you are still in charge. We are going to keep you in charge because you are coming up with such wonderful ideas.

9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?

Moderator: With these new programs, who should coordinate them? What time should these programs be offered and where should they take place? Okay, so you guys think that over for a minute. So thinking about the programs that you have both mentioned, who should coordinate them? Where should they be offered and what times?

Annette: Parents with teachers because not every parent works. If I was not a working parent, like right now I have my little part time, if I was not working, I know there is more, there are a percentage of parents that would volunteer to do this at school. In the same school you have what, the lunch room, the cafeteria, they divide those tables for different levels, 10th grade, 11th, 12th whatever grade levels and have two parents volunteering to help kids. What times? Okay school finishes at 2:45. Okay, they can go home, eat a snack because okay we are not going to have snacks available, okay you go home, go eat a snack and some milk and cookies, and you come back at 5:00 from 5:00 to 7:00. It is not like we have to be open 24 hours a day. Two hours I think we can accomplish a lot because how long is the kids' homework? I feel in the school parents are

willing to volunteer because I would be one that would be willing to volunteer.

Moderator: Parents working with teachers in the school.

Annette: Yes, in the school.

Moderator: Kind of give them a break in between and have them come back a little bit later.

Annette: I am going to go there because I am going to see my friend. I know Margie is going over there to do her homework so I am going to go over there and she will see Margie, she will be happy to see Margie but she will be happy because she did her homework and mom is not going to say anything.

Moderator: How about your program Angela?

Angela: I guess the teachers. Somebody that really wants to make this fun at the same time for them like a summer fun program so they can look forward to all summer going to the Botanical Gardens because I want to know how these flowers and I like this and that, make it fun at the same time. Teachers, I mean parents that is optional, I mean they should tell the parents to please participate or become part of it, like she says, if they do not have a job or they want to help, they should keep that in mind, we are going on this trip and we would really like the parents, those that can come will let us know, and we can put them in there, but like I said, I guess the teachers. So I say teachers and parents, yes, they should be allowed also if they want to become part of it or help in anyway, not keep

them out. I think pretty much the program starts at 9:00 in the morning. At 9:00 between 8:00 and 9:00 everything just starts, everybody just starts getting up and motivated and is used to getting up. Not too early and not too late, because it is summer. You also do not want to get up at 6:30 in the morning to be at school at 7:45.

Moderator: Great point you guys, we are going to put you in charge. The thing is, I am looking at both of you and I realize that both of you have a lot of strength because first of all you have very good opinions. But there is another, sometimes I am wondering? Do you see the skills that you have that you could offer? Do you see skills that you have you could be offering your school district?

Annette: Me, I am outgoing, I will be there. I will volunteer and like I say my skills might not be very smart, but I will make learning educational and fun, both together. Let's make this happen, let's show them we can do this; I will make it educational but a fun thing together. And, I think I can make, I can do that and I think because a lot of parents out there they can do it but they do not offer these programs and if they would, kids would say, "I want to go back there, (teacher) is the one that is going to give the course today." They will be looking forward to that because it is not going to be, "oh we are just going to read this." No it has to be an educational fun thing, doing it together so that a kid could look forward, and I would benefit out of that because I like that, and it helps my self-esteem go up

also because I say well I am good for something. I am helping these kids and that helps me feel okay with me.

Moderator: Great point.

Angela: That is really important. It is motivation and I am an outgoing person and I like to do things and I like to know that I helped somebody and that I made somebody smile, and yes it is a matter of not making it boring. The kids will sit there and their minds will wander and you are talking and making it fun and learning at the same time. I mean sometimes because if you got a teacher that, I mean, or something in school that is so strict, kids would be like, "I hate going to that class." God, that teacher just, he cannot do this, it is motivation. It is just like telling a kid, "Okay so you do not like that book? Well why don't we try this book." You know, "you cannot understand these big words? Then let's find something simpler." It is making it easier on them than on us. I mean they are the ones that are going to keep going, I mean, and look forward to going to that class and going to that after school program or that summer school. Summer, summer is to lay back, oh no, I am going to summer school because we are going to the Botanical Gardens, we are going to see flowers and I have always wanted to know how they did this or see the rain forest and, whatever so I think being motivated and having, there is that line. Remember I can be your friend but I am, the adult, the teacher here, and I will help you in any which way I can. But, instead of making it hard for them make it that they can talk to you that they can tell you, "I am having

this problem at home or having this problem with this student.” Making it seem like it is okay, it will be okay. “You cannot read that? Then fine, we will find another book with smaller words, do not feel like you can’t.” “I do not want to go there because I do not understand that book. It has big words,” make it motivating. Fine we will go to the library and see maybe we can get bigger letters, bigger words, so you can feel like you want to go there, you want to do this and say all right. I can do this, because my teacher is understanding, she motivates me, she lets me know everything is going to be okay, it is all right, you do not know how to read then okay well let’s try this, instead of well, no you cannot be in this class because we are far ahead and you have to catch up. Catch up? You will be back there all the time.

Annette: I feel they also bring that home, oh, they say “we go with this teacher and she is wonderful and she helps me.” Volunteering and sometimes that single parent that comes home from work stressed because she cannot do it. She is okay. She is okay because she knows that kid is okay and he is being helped and he is enjoying being helped and she sees that he has learned something. Most definitely when good things happen, kids go back and tell their parents, “Oh mom you know what? This is happening, I am getting this because this teacher is helping me, this volunteer was helping me and it is wonderful.” That gives relief to stressful parents that they cannot do that and remember kids always bring the good news home. When it is bad stuff they do not really want to talk about it, and that would

make me very mad to know that I came home from work and (child) has so much homework and I could not help her. But if she can tell me, “Hey, Mom, you know what? They have this volunteer there and she is such a nice person, Mommy. She helped me on this, this and this and look how I did it, look how I did it.” Instead of my having to sit down, hey I am looking at it, I am going to be so proud and be happy. I know my kids, I think these programs will definitely be really helpful.

10. As a parent what do you see as your children’s greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

Moderator: I think you have come up with some amazing programs. You never fail to surprise me anyway, and I always know that you women are wonderful and this is just more proof of that. Okay, here comes the tuffy. As a parent, what do you see as your child or children’s greatest advantage and what is their greatest difficulty in school?

Annette: Difficulty in school, is that like math and stuff?

Moderator: It could be whatever it has to be for you.

Annette: Because my daughter, she does not really care much for math and I told her that is like one of the most important things today because everything is about math. Money and wages and everything are about money. I mean, it is just like, math. Math you got to know how to add when you go shopping. How much you are getting back, and if you are going to buy a house, you have to know how much taxes are on the house; I think math is very, very important. She does not really like care much for it but I told

her that is not good. I would rather you do not care about volleyball, I would rather you care about that one, that is very, very important. And I have tried asking her about computer classes. For some reason I think computers are just one big, it is going to count for a lot of things in the future. That is my opinion and she does like computers. She likes that class very, very much. And she says, "Mommy, one day computers are going to rule the world." I said, "Good, so you are in there, right." "Yes, I like that class. I like working on the computer and stuff." But what doesn't she like it about math? So me and her try, like I tell her, we will try to pick up an extra course for math if you are having trouble with it. We will just take another class of math instead of taking three study halls or two study halls and get two math classes, and she tries, but it is like she says, "it is just so many numbers, Mom, it is too many of them, they are never ending." But, I mean, like I think that is something she really can get really on top of the world if she at least gets the math.

Moderator: So it is kind of like maybe we could put her into Angela's after school program to get that extra help and get her into the summer school where she is using the math somehow and taking it outside of the class, learning exactly how it might work. So we are using both of your programs. But then you think an advantage for her is the fact that she has the computers, if I understand you correctly. She has computers in those classes and obviously it is something you say she enjoys, so this is something that is an advantage.

Annette: She keeps telling me, “Mom, this world, everything is about computers today.” And, I do not know how to use a computer. I say, “How do you do this? Put me in here.” I am looking at her and I am, oh my, okay. And she is so happy, “Move over, Mom.” And we go, I have a friend of mine and we go to her house and she has a computer and sometimes she calls and says, “Mom, can I go over to Jenny’s house? I want to check something on the computer,” and I will call Jenny, and she will say, “sure come on over” and yes, I mean, she looks, she keeps saying the whole world is going to be computers. So I respect that if that is how she sees it. But she definitely likes computer class, just the math like she says, numbers are never ending. Numbers never end.

Moderator: How about you Angela?

Angela: I would go with the sports issue.

Moderator: Is that an advantage or disadvantage?

Angela: It is difficult because like I said she wanted to play, she looks so forward to playing tennis and sometimes we have to see the point that, okay, I am not trying to overrate this but sometimes I am the minority, they have those good parents with the good background and they went to school and they are able to be there. And us, the lower-income minority people, we did not have all of that so we have to struggle to get it because we have, like right now she had one point less, she could not play and that for her, she was really upset. I think that sometimes it keeps the kids from ever wanting to try again because okay what if next year I want to play

basketball? Just because I do not have a point I cannot play. It breaks their hopes down. But my kids, I always tell my kids, they say the way I went out, they like the challenge, they will go. You know what? I am going to do this and I am going to do it but not every kid is like that. I feel that if the kid wants to play, let them play. At least the first semester you let them know what is going to happen. Well you have to maintain, you did not have the scores you needed to play but we are going to let you play and you have to bring them up or maintain them. At least the kid knows if I want to keep on playing. I feel that if they do not get the opportunity, it brings them down it just brings them down.

Moderator: What is the advantage? Do you have any advantages?

Annette: Advantages, yes because they are always willing to try something new. It is an advantage because they want too; they want to learn something new. It is a new skill. It is something they look forward to, you give them the opportunity to grow. That is an advantage right there, the opportunity to grow and say what situation am I in, I have these goals and I have to accomplish this to meet these goals, I am going to accomplish them, it gives them hope, I can do this.

11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Moderator: Last question, how do you feel about participating in this interview? How do you feel about it?

Annette: I love it, because it is a freedom of speech, maybe these ideas that we were talking about right here; that tape goes on to somebody in a high position.

They say, well, you know what, maybe this is a good idea, maybe we should do this, and I feel that when it comes to our children, we should participate in everything there is because, okay, we had our opportunity and life is not getting any better, it is more of a struggle nowadays and there needs to be changes and our voices need to be heard for all the kids. That is the way I feel.

Angela: I feel great because sometimes we learn from each other's ideas. We all think different. That is what makes everybody different. I can feel, I felt like I was free to talk, there was no right or wrong answer. I am sure I helped with something, somebody or something with how I felt, maybe somebody is out there thinking, something like me. I have always thought about this summer program. You are not going to get in trouble because you think this way or you are not dumber because you do not know the same answer as her and we are not getting graded and it is just a matter of feeling free. Be yourself kind of thing. Be authentic and true and we are thinking about the future of the kids and what makes them want to keep staying in school and going to school and going on in life because it is not getting easier. So I think it was really good. I am glad I came. My sister asked me, "what are you going to talk about?" and I said, "I don't know." But I said okay and I am glad, yes, because like I said, maybe one day they will listen to these tapes and watch these videos or whatever and say, summer school, maybe we need to start doing this, maybe we need to try that out, I think that is good. Why don't we give it a try? So I think I know

I helped somebody if not at least myself, like I said because I really never looked at that lunch issue and stuff about my daughter asking her, “what did you have for lunch? So did you like it? Was it okay?” I mean, so I also learned from it by listening to her opinions and how to look for little things I like I said the little things I should at least look into, keep an open mind and ear. I learned something, just listening to her opinions and ideas and like I said that will help somebody, there is a not right or wrong answer here. Everything was valid. Everything was good.

Moderator: I think (school) city district would be very lucky to start some kind of program discussions with parents and include the two of you. If they ever do and you hear about it, you will fit right in and number one and number two, if I ever hear they are putting one in, I am going to give them your names.

Angela: Yes, definitely I will go to Annette’s summer school program because I do not have a car to go on a trip to the museum. I want to go to the museum, not only the kids, me too. I want to do it.

Moderator: Well, thanks, ladies. We really appreciate you participating in our program today. Thanks for showing up. I know it was a nasty morning and you got up early.

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview 2: 10/4/2003

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school districts do your children attend (what grade are your children in)?

Moderator: We are going to begin, and remember everybody's opinion counts and what we are going to do when we start this, we are going to kind of start general and then we are going to get into more specific questions. But, initially, what I would like you to do is if you would just tell how many children you have, whether they are boys or girls, what are their ages, and their school district.

Debbie: I have got two grand kids I am raising. They are in elementary school. One boy is eight and one girl is seven.

Denise: I have two kids, 19 and 18. My 18 year old just graduated from high school this year.

Bonita: I have three children. My oldest one is 26, (name) is 13, and (name) he is 6 and they all go to schools in Geauga County.

2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have they participated in the program(s)?

Moderator: Now one of the things that we talked about when we were setting up this group is the fact that your kids participate in some type of federal program. Whether that was a lunch program, a Title I program, a school

breakfast program that is what brought us together. That is the common thing that we all have. So what I would like for you to do is to tell me what programs your children are participating in and how long they may have participated.

Debbie: Mine are in the school lunch program. They get breakfast in the morning and lunch at school. That is just about all because they do not need much for anything else. But they have been doing that ever since they have been in kindergarten.

Denise: Mine were in the lunch program. They were in it for about maybe 6 or 7 years. And just the lunch, they did not have breakfast.

Bonita: Mine are also in the lunch program. They have been doing it for about three years now and they get lunch and that is it. I am not sure if (child) participated in Title I.

Moderator: The math and the reading?

Bonita: Yes, she did participate one year in the reading help when we first moved out to Geauga County because the school systems we moved from are so far behind, so she needed that help to catch up to where she belonged.

3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: So we have a good number of programs represented, which is good. I am going to ask some feeling questions, and sometimes those can be hard to

answer, but you just go ahead and tell me. How do you feel about the kids participating in these federal programs? What do you think about them? How do you feel about the program itself? And do you want your kids in the program?

Debbie: In the city schools it is supposed to be helpful, it is supposed to because they are supposed to get their lunches and I do say the words “supposed too.” Most of the time my kids did not get their lunches.

Moderator: Ever, always, sometimes?

Debbie: Three-fourths of the time not!

Moderator: Because what happened?

Denise: They changed it where there were no lunch periods. They were going to do it through the homeroom and the homeroom you only got 20 minutes. That means you had to go downstairs and get in line and if you were not in, 20 minutes is up and you are still in line, you do not get your lunch. Okay or they send students down there to get their lunches and the students did not come back with all the lunches. So it is messed up. The system is messed up.

Debbie: I felt that the school lunch programs were okay but they were not nutritious enough. They used to complain all the time that they did not get vegetables. They allowed even small kids to make their choices of what they wanted and there were no vegetables. He complained because there were no vegetables. And (child), she was not really thrilled with the lunches either but I told her she had to eat.

Bonita: Mine were okay with it at first. My oldest daughter did not like it because she was kind of ostracized, now she is like, “oh well, I know a lot of people that get free lunch” so it is okay and she gets a salad and whatever she chooses. They have pizzas so she can eat, because she is a vegetarian, so she can eat that. My son sometimes he will come back because they do give them like a choice of sides, and he will go, “well I did not take the green beans, and I did not take the peaches” and that is not really good for him to being eating spaghetti and not to eat the green beans but they give them the choice; being he is only six. (Name), she loves it, she gets her cheeseburger and fries everyday. It seems to help me out too because I do not have to spend the extra expense of packing the lunch and the time and try to get your kids to pack a lunch. They like to pack, but it is the extra expense that now the school system is taking, the federal program is taking care of it so you do not have too.

Moderator: So that has been helpful?

Bonita: It has been helpful.

4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: Thinking about your children and thinking about them academically, with their studies and socially, what benefits do you see because they participate in these programs?

Debbie: They are more alert in the afternoon after they have had a lunch because they have got something in their system. If they did not have anything in their system, I think they would doze off during the rest of their classes.

Moderator: Other things?

Bonita: Well I notice my oldest daughter. She is in drill team after school and the same thing with my second one, so they get a hot lunch versus taking something else so they are kind of more fueled to do their extra-curricular activities after school and they are not quite as hungry because they do not get home until 4:30 and 6:00.

Moderator: No, that is good and it is good that your kids tell you these things.

Moderator: Anything that you want to add (Denise).

Denise: No.

5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.

Moderator: Thinking about yourselves, parents or grandparents, how have these programs helped you?

Debbie: They would have helped with the food but, like I said, my kids did not eat lunch, they did not get it. So it was supposed to help with the food budget and everything.

Bonita: That is how mine helps with the food and the budget monetarily plus it is something that you do not have to remember to do. So it is one less thing that you have to remember to do and you do not have to give them a bag

and remember the drink. Do not put the drink in the bag. If you put the drink in the bag, the bag rips.

Moderator: So it saves you a little bit of effort.

Bonita: Yes, it saves me effort and money, monetary concerns too.

Moderator: How about you, Debbie?

Debbie: It is saving me the time and stuff and I only live a block and a half away from the school. They would not want to pack lunch if they did not eat at school. They would want me to come up to the school, pick them up, bring them home, cook something and take them back to school. That is too much work for me. When I get a half block away from the house I would be tired.

Moderator: Well you are a grandma so I can understand that.

6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children's achievement in school? Please explain?

Moderator: What I want you to think about now are the programs and how did these programs help to support any of your children's achievements?

Bonita: I know the Title I brought (child) up to where she should be now. Now she is able to keep up with the schools and get her work done and she gets decent grades and before that without Title I she would have not known how to use cursive and she would not be reading up to level and she would not have gotten the grades.

Moderator: That is good, yes, that is a good thing to point out. Yes, because we do not sometimes think that the fact that if you shift a district, everybody thinks third grade is third grade, but it is not.

Denise: All school systems, all classes are different. They are so behind it could be forward and everything and that hurts a lot of kids. But you see I never had to worry about Title I or anything because my kids were okay.

Moderator: They did not have that.

Denise: Right.

Moderator: No need to use the program.

Denise: Now if you are talking about lunches and how it helped, I see kids that do not eat all day, they move slower, more withdrawn. They cannot think because they have hunger pains. Now the ones that did eat lunch, they were more attentive and more active, it is like food for thought, you have to have food for thought.

Moderator: That is a good statement.

Bonita: Like my daughter with extracurricular stuff, if they would not have the lunch, then they would not be able to do the extracurricular thing.

Denise: Like I said, they were going to cut the school lunches completely. Parents worry about the kids that do have after school activities. They are not going to eat except in the morning and they would not eat and the next time they have food is like 6:00 or 7:00 at night. No, a kid cannot go that many hours without food or nothing. And now they are bringing the lunches back like I said, but it is such a hassle now. I mean there are so

many problems you only got 20 minutes. If you are in line and 20 minutes are up, you do not get your lunch; that is wrong, I am sorry. You are standing in line in the cafeteria, then they close the cafeteria down and what they will do is bag you your lunch. You got a card you can get it free or if you have to pay so much off, whatever, they send two students down there and those students come back. They do not bring back all the lunches and those kids that were supposed to get lunches are screwed again! I mean this is the way (school) city schools have been for the last two years. It is not working, hello! We told them to get rid of the candy, vending machines but they are putting french fries machines into the school systems in case kids do not get lunch. They can buy french fries.

Moderator: Let me ask you, Debbie. Is there a breakfast program now for your kids?

Debbie: Yes, but they do not go to it. They like my breakfast better.

Moderator: Because you fix breakfast. Now do your (Bonita) kids have it in their schools?

Bonita: No, we do not have it, just the lunch program.

Denise: My grandchildren, they do have the breakfast.

Moderator: Obviously you are close to them.

Denise: Yes, they do have breakfast and lunch and everything.

Moderator: All right, so the schools do have breakfast, the same as Debbie?

Denise: And I know they have cereal, juice in the morning. That is what they get in the mornings. They have whatever cereal they want and juice.

Moderator: So if I understand what you are saying correctly, you feel pretty positive that these programs help with student achievements.

Debbie: Yes.

Moderator: So you can see some directions.

Denise: Like I said food for thought.

Moderator: Very good, I like that “food for thought.” I like the idea about the activities after school.

Bonita: If your kid is not getting a proper lunch then they are not able to perform as good.

Denise: No because the food gives you the energy. You have to live off the energy and the way you get your energy is through the food. So food is, like they say, food is a major thing.

Moderator: You bet. All right, thanks. Now, guess what, I am going to make you all queens.

Denise: We know it.

7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children’s performance in school?

Moderator: You are the ones in charge. So you are the head of this now, I want you to think if there were changes and if any changes need to be made. What would you do to change any of these programs with which you have been affiliated?

Bonita: I think I would have the younger kids, like for the little kids, they have to take fruits and vegetables and at least attempt to at least eat some of it, rather than them having the choice of whether or not they want it, like my older daughter is a vegetarian. Give her more than a choice of either cheese pizza or salad. Like she said, “if I take salad with something that is there, it is usually gross but if I take a regular salad then I do not get anything else but salad and my drink,” and she says that is decent but it is not really her taste, to put it that way. They do not cater to everybody’s taste buds and like french toast sticks for lunch. My son gets like one choice, french toast sticks or one day they have chicken fingers, one day they have spaghetti or there other choice is peanut butter and jelly. No, that is about the only thing they get a choice of either what is served that day or peanut butter and jelly. But then again you cannot please everybody either. My kids get time to eat. If my middle school child does not get there in time, like if she has an appointment or else I take her in and it is time for her recess, she can go and eat lunch and they will give her time to eat her lunch. If she comes in late they will let her go and get the lunch or they will bring it to the office or stuff like that so they have that pretty good in (name of school) schools where they do try to cater to the kids a little bit.

Denise: Not in our school system. I think what it is and you hit it right on the nail is the variety, because a lot of people, like I said, there is a lot of

vegetarians out there and they have no choices and a lot of these kids are really picky or allergic to something.

Moderator: Peanuts, a lot of kids are allergic to peanuts.

Denise: You know, they are not thinking of them.

Moderator: So what would you do?

Denise: I would change it so that everybody would have nutritious lunches and more variety. I mean, for the ones that are vegetarians, ones that are just, give them all different varieties, know what they want.

Debbie: (Child) his complaint is that he says that he wishes the school would cook more real food.

Moderator: Cook more real food. What do you think he means by that, being that he is eight?

Debbie: Vegetables, meat, potatoes, more, he says that he got tired of ham sandwiches with cheese or pizza with nothing on it and things like that. He complained a lot about their choices, what they thought was nutritious. He is used to meat, potatoes and vegetables all the time.

Moderator: So if you were in charge, now this is your program, do not worry about what anybody else said what would you do?

Debbie: More nutritious, more variety, catered, like she said to vegetarians. My oldest son is allergic to rice; the school system when he was in school made him eat rice anyway. He ended up in the hospital for a week.

Moderator: So you would give, everybody seems to be in agreement if I understand you correctly, that you want variety, a little more choice.

Bonita: Like the hospital, do where they make the kids that buy lunch pick it out the day before. You get your choices.

Denise: Yes, that is what they should do. Have them have their own menu. On Friday make them look at a menu for the week and let them pick out what they want for the week coming. We have to have warmer food, especially in the wintertime. None of this cold shit, excuse my French. You know they have to have the warm stuff.

Bonita: Like have the warm stuff. Like in middle school, my daughter eats cheeseburger and fries every day because she says it is better than the other choice that they have. Then she is eating cheeseburger and fries so don't you dare make an issue.

Moderator: She likes that.

Debbie: And their breakfast is at the school. Even in the winter there is cold cereal, milk, and juice. My kids are used to eggs and bacon, or oatmeal, or waffles, or pancakes, or something in the morning on a cold day.

8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?

Moderator: Now, you are still in charge.

Denise: I love this.

Moderator: I know everybody loves to be in charge. It is fun to be in charge, okay because here you are this means you get to call it. What additional or new programs, whether that is from your school district, whether that is from the state, the city or the federal government, would you like to see offered

that you think would help your children be more successful in school? So be creative with your ideas. You do not have to think about other things we talked about.

Debbie: Okay, what we would want to see more of?

Moderator: Yes.

Debbie: This is my opinion?

Moderator: You are the one in charge. What additional program or new programs would you like to see that you think?

Debbie: Can we add to a program, add on to a program?

Moderator: Sure.

Bonita: Daycare at the schools. Childcare before school and after school, after school where you are sure of where your kid is. There is not a bus that takes them there. It is actually funded at the schools and breakfast would be an idea and also what healthy snacks that they could get in the afternoon like Granola Bars or stuff that if they have an extracurricular thing, they could go and either purchase them or make them available to the kids so they can have that extra little boost of something.

Moderator: So you would put some additional nutritional programs and make it easier for working people to get their kids, keeping the daycare right at that school as opposed to going, having to go.

Bonita: Yes, having to get another daycare elsewhere if your kid was at the school, say you had to be at work at 7:00 in the morning and you had to drive an hour, where do you leave your kid at 6:00 in the morning? You either find

somebody or you have a before school program, then you have to worry about how they are getting to the school, who is with them, how good is this, stuff like that.

Moderator: So improve a daycare program and a nutritional snack between the school and some after school activity. Okay, that is great. How about some other things here? Because you asked, Denise, you said could we add, yes, it could be additional or it could be new.

Denise: Well I think they need, like for the Title I for students that need help, in (school) city school there is only one teacher for them.

Moderator: One, you mean add one teacher?

Denise: Okay for all the schools, they have one teacher for all those three. She used to go from school to school to school, okay, they need more teachers. I do not care if it is part-time, maybe part-time teacher's aide something. They need help.

Moderator: To work on the Title I program the reading and the math, is what you are talking about?

Denise: Yes, they need more than one teacher for all these schools. They really do. They need to add more teachers.

Bonita: They also need tutors available for the kids when they fall behind in any subject, not just reading.

Denise: They used to have that in (school) city schools tutors from other schools would go and meet, they would go and teach, but that was cut down. No, they are not allowed to do that anymore. I do not understand why. They

are saying because the way the world is all the crime and that they are afraid somebody is going to get hurt or whatever. You know what? This is hurting the students that need the help. Okay, they are the ones that need the help. There are other students that are helping them, taking their time. Like they got to stay and they are taking their free time to go to that school to help the other students and now they cannot.

Moderator: You are saying tutors, Bonita, would your tutors be other students, adults, whatever, you tell me?

Bonita: I know in (school), they have tutors and my daughter (child) when she missed, for how fast pace they roll everything, when she missed a day in science she was behind like two days and then I said, “well you can go in during lunch to your science teacher, because I called her up, and she said well if she gets too far behind we will have a peer tutor” and (child) is like, “oh so somebody that does not even know me now, now knows that I need help so I am kind of ostracized.” I would make like more teacher aides available for that. So they would have adult people, even if they had a voluntary program where people in the community would help to tutor, adult people so they do not feel ostracized.

Moderator: Okay, good thought, good thought. Debbie, anything you want to add because you kind of have the kids pretty much at the lower end of the spectrum meaning the little kids.

Debbie: The older one has an after school reading program where you can take the kids. It is story time. But it is only every Thursday. They need to have it,

and (school) is the only school that does it. None of the other elementary schools do it. They need to have a program for all schools to have the story time. It needs to be five days a week at least my kids love it. And they complain because it is only once a week. They need to extend it and they need to take it to all the elementary schools. Because I think all the elementary kids could benefit from it, because (child) loves it. They had a puppet show one year and she sat and talked to the puppets. Not the people that were doing the voices, she actually talked and held a conversation with the puppets.

Moderator: Okay, and it is centered around some type of reading?

Debbie: Yes, there was one time a lady came in that wrote kids books and made puppets, big, full size puppets to go with the books and she brought them in and read the story and had the puppets tell them the story. The kids loved it though. The story time thing is good and they can go and instead of going to the library and borrowing books, like you can borrow them right from there. Bring it home for the kids to read or you read them to the kids and then take them back. The kids love it but they want it five days a week because they get upset because they can only go once a week.

Moderator: Bonita, anything you want to add from your youngest that you see?

Bonita: The only thing is social activities maybe more sports related stuff after school because we have (name) community education and the soccer program it is great. Parents are doing it but they cannot do it until 6:00. Now what it is running into now for our practices from 6:00 to 7:00 it is

becoming day light savings time and Dad does not realize that if we only have practice once a week, how good is your kid going to do in the game? They need more than one practice a week to get them better at their extracurricular game. And also kids this age, they use that as social time too and playing time and you need more, I think it is supervised play where the kids can get together and just be active with their peers, maybe like a little after school program like she said, story time or playing ball or someplace where your kids are safe.

9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?

Moderator: You guys are coming up with some great ideas here. Okay, we are moving on now. The programs that you have now mentioned, you need to flesh them out a little bit. Who would coordinate them? What time should those programs be offered? And where should they take place? Make it workable.

Denise: Well it should be at the schools.

Moderator: Okay, tell what your program is.

Denise: This is for the food and even Title I.

Moderator: Okay food and Title I.

Denise: It should be at the schools. And what you need to coordinate them they should have a special team. Let some of the parents be on it, let the parents get involved. This is about their kids and their kid's education. The parents

should be involved. I think the team should include a couple of parents. Make up a student board, a new board, let parents even let the students get involved because the students have their own minds. They are smart. The students should know what they want. The students should know what they want and let them have their say. Let the students stand up and say hey, we want to get involved. This is what we want, okay. This is what we would like to see.

Moderator: When would you run the program and where?

Denise: It would have to be at the schools.

Moderator: Okay.

Denise: You know and even for the food and that at the schools.

Moderator: And when? Just think when?

Denise: Well for breakfast, lunch and with Title I it could be during a study hall. It could be after school. It could be before school. So they will be there at all times, somebody will be there for them to help them.

Bonita: Well for the daycare I think that should be at school. I think it should be run by a separate unit that just focuses on daycare, like kind of like a Head Start thing but not really Head Start where it has its own way or board or chairperson that runs it and then they hire people to come in and watch the kids before and after. I think for extracurricular stuff they should do it right after school rather than at 6:00 at night where you have to drive your kid over here and over there and this way if it is at the school there is less chance of people that are not supposed to be there, to be there then at a

park. Although ours are pretty much policed real well with the parent, you know who everybody is. But there is still that chance if you are leaving your kid for an hour and say Dad is not supposed to come around and Dad does come around and the coach does not really know everything because you do not really want to make all that voiced to every parent around and it is not kept to yourself, where you have to tell the school, that is okay, because it is private for parents to be real chatty and all. This way they could make it a better program with more practices, more activities. I think young kids now basically sit in front of the T.V. too much and play Play-Station. They do not get out because first of all who wants their kids to walk down the street anymore by themselves?

Debbie: Nobody.

Bonita: I mean, I do not, my neighbor down the street, she lives about eight houses down and I am like (child), he can come down and our house is about an acre apart and I am like well, yes, but I have to walk him down and then we have to make sure to get somebody to walk him back. You have to really watch who your kids are with and where and when.

Moderator: So you think having an after school program at the school might then be helpful for the kids.

Debbie: Yes, make it one spot all the time. Never change different locations for practices. Practice right at the school.

Denise: Not just for practice, too, okay, because you are talking about just after school practice. They should have a recreation area for these little kids, for

these kids too. Kids that do not play in sports should have a little thing to do. They could have a little basketball. They could have tennis courts, something for little kids. Like when I was growing up many years ago and I went to school in Pennsylvania there was recreation, it was during the summer, we learned how to weave baskets. We learned all different things, just to keep the kids off the streets.

Moderator: These were through the schools themselves.

Denise: Yes.

Moderator: I mean they were done at the schools.

Denise: Yes, oh yes. You know we had basketball, swimming, but that is what the students need nowadays because like she said they are watching T.V., they are playing Play-Station. They have to have physical activity and a lot of kids are not in sports, sportsman and everything and they should have something for little kids too.

Bonita: Where I live unless you can afford to pay for your kids to belong to a recreation facility, there is no low-income, there is no low-income programs that are subsidized where your kid can belong to it unless you can pay so much money. Like for swimming programs in the summer it is \$300.00 and now they are opening the Geauga County YMCA.

Moderator: So that is going to make it more.

Bonita: Yes, that is going to make that, well like that is located in (town). That is not really located in our community. They are trying to build a recreation center but then they are saying, oh well, so many people that belong to

country clubs and all these different clubs how is that going to benefit? So they want to tone it down rather than making it for the benefit of all and your property value would go up with all these things. Recreational facilities, civic centers, places with senior centers, places where kids can go, like I guess out at (city), they have their recreation center right in the school. My daughter says they have T.V. areas where they can go and watch movies and they are not running around the streets. They are not running to go to the mall. They are not hanging out at the corner. They are in a place that is supervised.

Denise: That is what I am saying they should have that now. They should have that here too.

Moderator: Within the school district? You would kind of notice that nobody would be any different. I hear you saying that you do not want anyone ostracized at the school because of income level, and everybody can take part. Okay, good thoughts. Anything you have to add Debbie?

Debbie: The reading program and stuff like that need to be extended. The school has a little trailer in the back where you go for the reading program. Make the building bigger and get more parents involved and have a trailer and put it at all the other schools and get the parents as the committee to run it to get this reading, the little story times started and stuff. I mean parents can go in and bring books from their own home and read it to the kids. That could be a book another child has read. Because (name), he always asked the lady that ran the reading, "Can I bring one of my own books in?"

Mommy has a lot of books for me. Can I bring one in and you read it to the other kids?" And half the books that I had I read to the kids, the other kids never heard of them. And stuff like that. Get the parents, one week one parent bring in a book or one day one parent bring in a book to read the kids and have the parents do that instead of having to get other people from out of town come in with books and telling stories. Have the parents right in your own towns.

Denise: Have people sign up to come in there and take a half an hour.

Debbie: If you are going to bring your child to listen to the stories, they should get involved in reading them.

Denise: Yes, because half of these parents, they are bitching about how the, excuse my French, about how the school system is and everything but they do not want to get involved.

Debbie: When they would let (name) bring one of the books in from home, I was the one that read it to him, to the kids because I felt it was (name) or (name) book and it should be me that read it to them instead of having somebody that works there, I would just read it to them.

Moderator: Good. You guys have come up with some great ideas here.

Denise: Because we are terrific.

10. As a parent what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

Moderator: As a parent or grandparent, what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty at school?

Debbie: I think (name) his and (name) her greatest advantage before they started school is they knew everything they needed to know. I mean (name) he was reading and spelling before he even went to Kindergarten. If you work with them at home, that gets them ready for school ahead of time so it is easier for the teachers, they could work with other kids that did not learn that at home.

Moderator: How about an advantage in school and a difficulty in school?

Debbie: (Name) helped the other kids learn their alphabet. He was sitting there teaching the kids how to read books. He was teaching the kids how to read small little words or to spell small little words that they would understand while the teacher was off helping other students do stuff. (Name) did not have an advantage on anything she just did not want.

Moderator: And how about difficulty, what do see as a difficulty?

Debbie: (Name) had difficulty getting along with a lot of the other kids because they would make fun of him because of his nationality and because he had to live with his grandmother rather than his mother. And (name) is a real stubborn little girl. They would do that with her and she would hit them. The teasing was a lot of disadvantage, yes. And I was going to his school a lot because he would start arguing with the other kids and stuff like that, and trying to explain to them why he had to live with me was really hard because the other kids did not understand.

Moderator: How about you Denise, the greatest advantage? You got a child that just graduated, one that graduated two years ago. So what do you see as an advantage that they had in school and their difficulties?

Denise: They did not have to put up with you for six hours. Just kidding. I want to say two things, but the one I am not going to say. No, the way my kids were treated by what their father had.

Moderator: No one outside of us, they may not know so I mean that is up to you, what you care to say, honey.

Denise: My kids' father died of AIDS. One of the disadvantages was that the teachers, the students, the parents, they should have a class to teach about this because my kids were treated like shit. They were not allowed to eat in the cafeteria. They had to eat in the library. They were not allowed to sit on the desks. Like I said this is bullshit. I mean that is one of the disadvantages. These students and these teachers were closed-minded because they still believe that you can catch AIDS by breathing and by talking and by drinking, okay. One of the advantages my kids had, honestly, I cannot think of one. Some of the teachers, they cared. Okay, some of these teachers nowadays, it is only a job to them but some of them they love their jobs and they really wanted to teach the students. Nowadays some of these teachers do not care, they say it is only a job. I mean I have seen it and everything.

Moderator: You should have just dragged them to your house. Let me admit, that is one of the sweetest men.

Denise: My kids, they never had a life when they were young they were adults and everything because the teachers would say you kids act way too mature. They were like adults. But of course what they had to go through, watching their father and everything, my kids went through a lot, physically, emotionally, mentally, and everything.

Moderator: So that was a disadvantage.

Denise: And an advantage.

Moderator: But again, they did have some teachers that cared.

Denise: Yes that did care, yes.

Moderator: That you considered very caring. Okay, good. Bonita.

Bonita: The disadvantage my oldest daughter ran into with school was we had came from (community) and moved to (community). This (community) has a much better school system, they did not have placement tests so because she was a straight A student in (community) they stuck her in honors. Then I had this teacher going, “well I cannot help her catch up because that is not what we do in honors” and kept her in there and she struggled and struggled and struggled rather than having a placement test to see where kids belong. And where their weaknesses and where their strengths are because some school systems do have weaker school systems and some are better and where somebody might be an A in math in one district they might be a C in the district you are coming in too. Okay, then she was kind of, she went into sixth grade and there were a lot of cliques. They do not try to, once kids get to middle school they do not try to tell

them, well this is the new person, let's accept these people, they are here now. It is not where you came from, it is where you are going. They do not emphasize that and like you said they do not emphasize racial differences. They do not emphasize, well someone, it is all right if so and so dies from cancer but not from AIDS. It is not socially acceptable and people they do not try to educate people socially, they just have what is in their mind, it is not educating people on what is really true.

Moderator: So you think that was a disadvantage?

Bonita: A disadvantage that way, now she has an IEP. But another advantage in (school) is because it is such a wealthy district, when my daughter did go through her trauma, they did not give her really that hard of a time getting an IEP as they say my friend that had one in (community), where she only got Section 504 and her daughter went way more than my daughter did. My daughter has got an IEP. Now she fits in. She is doing very well. (Name) had the Title I and they were not afraid to give it to her and she did really well. They do have that extra help. Now for (name), he, like his father, is not around so they have him going into counseling for kids of divorce without families with different families and too my kids have my mother and they have me which makes them loved in a different way as opposed to other people that have a mom and dad and they should stress that every family is different like Sesame Street does. Every family is different. Some people have grandmas, some people have mommys, and

some people have daddys. Some people have sisters and brothers. Some do not and they need to stress these differences all over the place.

Moderator: But you feel your district is giving you an advantage.

Bonita: Yes.

Moderator: They are taking that into account.

Bonita: Well because there are a lot of wealthy people around, but see they do not have a lot for lower income people.

Moderator: But as far as the family make-up, they seem to be handling that in various ways.

Bonita: They handle it in various ways because they do have the funding from the other, I am not saying parents handle it right but the school system seems to be giving them support, which makes it good.

11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Moderator: How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Debbie: I think this is great because it has given them things to think of. This is what is going to help. Because they are going to get people's opinions and maybe it will do something for the positive, okay. I mean this will help and everything.

Denise: It feels good to get your opinion out about something instead of just keeping your mouth shut and not being able to say it because nobody is going to listen.

Debbie: It also lets you hear the different problems that other people have and if it can also help one person, it helps one person.

Denise: That is what it is for. It might just help.

Debbie: Maybe there are more people that because the way the economy is, they might not seek the help but there are people out there that if it would be presented to them would use it, if it were more available to them.

Moderator: Good point. Good point all. So we certainly thank you for participating in this today.

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview 3: 10/8/2003

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school districts do your children attend (what grade are your children in)?

Moderator: Okay ladies, we are going to get started on this and the first thing is real easy. I need to know how many children you have, if they are boys or if they are girls, and what their ages are and in which school district are your children. Connie.

Connie: Fourteen and a half year old twins, a boy and a girl and they go to (school).

Cindy: I have a daughter. She is 13 years old and she attends (school).

Becky: I have a boy 10, a girl 8, and a boy 7 and they are in (schools).

Carla: I have three girls, 11, 10, and 6 and they go to (schools).

2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have they participated in the program(s)?

Moderator: We are talking about some of the Title programs that come through the districts, things like the national lunch program, the breakfast program, Title I for math and reading, any of those federal programs in which your kids participate. Would you just tell me what they are and how many years that your children have participated in them? If I have my daughter in sixth grade and she has been in the lunch program since she started she

would have been in for seven years if she started in kindergarten. I do not know if you have full-time kindergarten. So if you would kindly give me an idea, just a general number, it does not have to be exact.

Connie: My two children have always gotten the reduced lunches. That has been very helpful.

Moderator: All right, are they in any of the other programs; are they in Title I math or reading?

Connie: My son has had help with math and reading. But he generally says that he knows most of that stuff from the classroom already.

Moderator: Okay.

Moderator: Good, so we have a reading program, we do the lunches and we have had them for a long time.

Connie: Yes.

Moderator: Okay.

Cindy: My daughter, ever since kindergarten has been in the free lunch program. This is the first year that she is reduced lunch and she has had mostly the Title reading but last year in the middle school she had math and that really worked out nice.

Moderator: Great, good, all right.

Becky: My kids have had free lunch for two years and my seven year old went through the reading one year.

Moderator: Okay, great, thanks.

Carla: My children have had free lunch and then there was one school that they participated in that they had the breakfast too and that was free so that was really helpful. When you are low-income, that is a very helpful program. Then two of my children are in the Title I reading and I think that is a good program to have, they had problems with reading, to have somebody there to help them out with that, I do see an improvement.

Connie: See my kids could get the breakfast in the morning but they do not get there in time to get to the cafeteria, by the time their bus gets there it is time for them to get to class.

Moderator: Oh, okay.

Connie: That is what they tell me, they do not make it in time, and it is too much of a rush.

3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: How do you feel about your children participating in these federal programs? Do you want them to participate and kind of give me an explanation.

Connie: I wish they did not have to, but I mean, I don't make bad money. I make decent money. I get child support. It is not bad child support and I still qualify. So what is that saying? I mean I cannot afford to pay the amount that they charge.

Moderator: So would you say that you are okay with it?

Connie: Yes, I am okay. I know that they are probably going to be embarrassed as they get older but right now they do not seem to mind it.

Moderator: Okay.

Becky: I do not, like you said being embarrassed. I remember when I was going to school and I would look at people and they would have the ticket. They stood out because they had a lunch ticket.

Connie: But now they have a computer.

Becky: Now, well some schools may have the computer. Where mine are going, they do not have the computer.

Connie: Oh really.

Becky: So they still carry tickets but everybody has a ticket so I do not think the kids know now that they are in the lunch program.

Connie: When they were growing up, they got the reduced or free lunches because their dad died when they were very young. I know when they got up to high school they just did not get their lunch because they did not want to be embarrassed because their dad died when they were very young.

Becky: Kids, they can be very cruel when they know you get a free lunch because your parents do not make any money. But now, like I said, if you make it into a system where other kids do not have to know anything about it; like we came from (community), it was all computers, nobody knew anything. It was all computers! Each kid had a pin number and it is entered into the computer and it came off an account. If the federal money was put in

there, or if parents put money in there, then the note went home when the account was empty. That worked really, really well.

Connie: And that is what they have here.

Moderator: That is what they have here, the computer.

Connie: Yes.

Moderator: Okay.

Connie: A pin number.

Moderator: You are in the middle school?

Connie: Yes.

Moderator: Okay, in the high school now.

Connie: Yes.

Becky: This was elementary in (state). Now here they have the lunch ticket, it is not a lunch that they can look at and identify.

Moderator: So everybody is carrying a ticket?

Connie: I think that at the elementary here I think they have the same thing when they go to elementary, I am pretty sure that they had to give them tickets for reduced.

Cindy: But I think 10 years ago, yes, a lot of the kids were embarrassed about the lunch ticket. But now because there is so many kids involved everywhere, I do not think the kids mind it at all. I mean my daughter has not mentioned anything about being embarrassed or anything.

Becky: Like you said to go back to the original question, how do I feel about it, I love it! I love it; it takes the strain off of me. I do not have to worry about getting up and packing food for everybody.

Connie: My son, I could go out and get that stuff and he would eat it within two or three days at home. He used to do that in grade school. They would want their lunch packed. I would go buy the stuff and he would be snacking on it and then within the week the stuff would be gone. This way you go to school and you get it.

Becky: You do not have to worry.

Carla: I am wondering why is it that just some of the schools provide the breakfast.

Moderator: That I cannot tell you.

Carla: I would like to see them maybe offer that in all the schools. They make a big issue that breakfast is such an important meal, and a lot of times I do not have time to prepare a breakfast for the kids.

Moderator: I do not know why, I cannot answer that not being in the educational field. I do not know what the criteria are that allows a school to have the breakfast. I know some of them do. I do not know if it is the district. If it is figured out on a financial means. I have not the faintest idea but obviously that is something we need to discuss further.

Becky: Yes, they are doing these tests and stuff now. My daughter, she is in fourth grade, and doing the proficiency tests, and while I am driving them, that provides enough time to at least sit down and have a bowl of cereal. So I

feel like if she can get up and have a bowl of cereal, piece of toast, whatever, then go in, she will have a little bit better chance of doing a little bit better on her test. Because the school she attends does not offer breakfast.

Moderator: Do any of your children get breakfast?

Cindy: No, because there is no time.

Moderator: Did they have it at school?

Connie: Mine have it at school they say, but I buy stuff at home and they do eat at home but not every morning because sometimes they are in a rush. Sometimes, I can buy four boxes of granola bars. I can buy four boxes of Pop Tarts. I can buy four boxes of cereal to last two weeks but after the first day it is gone.

Carla: The first day?

Connie: You know what I am saying, you say, please, that is meant to last two weeks. I will say, buy whatever they want for breakfast, please make it last two weeks. There is no reason you got to eat it up in three days.

Moderator: But in the high school they do have the breakfast. Do they have it in the middle school?

Cindy: Yes, they do because it was offered the last two years. The bus gets in to late. Now for the last two years and this year my daughter has complained that there are so many kids in line you only have so much time to eat and you cannot get through the lines so maybe there might be 5 or 10 minutes

and she has to eat her food so fast and she gets an upset stomach or sometimes she has to throw it away because there was no time.

Becky: My daughter came home and I am talking about the youngest one, and she said, “Look, Mommy, they made me throw my chocolate milk out.” Because she does not gobble her food down, they should not, they do not get enough time to sit and eat. Maybe if they shortened the recess time a little and tacked it onto the lunch so they can have a little bit more time to eat their meal and not have to worry about trying to rush or throw it away, that might be kind of helpful.

Cindy: Okay, but like in the junior high they do not have recess but there is just an abundance of kids.

Carla: Do they do a line?

Cindy: Well, yes, but (child) says there is just too many kids and they do have the three lunch periods, but there is, I mean the school is so overcrowded, she is not getting enough time.

Connie: My kids get picked up at 6:30am and they are sitting in their classroom until 7:10. You have hundreds and hundreds of kids.

Cindy: Either there needs to be an added lunch or something.

Connie: Too much stuff going on in the school system in a day.

Moderator: We are hearing you.

4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.

- Moderator:** Now do you see benefits of these programs? Do you see any benefits academically? What do you think?
- Carla:** Yes, because I am not in the position to help my kids learn to read better. I was in a learning disability classes myself when I was little, I get by, I get by just on the basics. I am not in a position to teach them and I thank God that they have these programs available so that they can maybe learn more than what I got from school and go farther in life than I did, so I think it is a good thing, I really do.
- Cindy:** Now the math, I have been out of school for 30 years.
- Connie:** I have been out 25.
- Cindy:** I do not understand this math.
- Connie:** They show me the math and I just go, I do not even understand it.
- Cindy:** So when my daughter was able to be in the program for the math it really helped her and when she was even having more problems, the math teacher would help or send her back to the Title I math person and her grades were okay, I mean, so thank goodness for that. I do not know what they have in the junior high but I hope so because it is going to get a little more difficult and I do want her to continue in these programs.
- Becky:** I definitely agree with the reading. He only took it for the half of the year last year and in first grade. I am trying to think what grade, in first grade he took it and like I said it was only for a half a year, he does not like to spend a whole bunch of time reading. I do not push him or force him to read because I am just starting, I am reading myself. But, he needed that

one on one time and for me having three kids and when they come it is like, sit down because you have to do your homework because you have to eat because you have to go here and there. And so for me to sit down and try to help each one it gets really, really stressful. So to have somebody else to be able to sit down with him and help him one on one like he needed, it helped so much.

Moderator: Any other comments about that. Do you think that socially it has helped the kids?

Carla: I am not really sure if I understand.

Moderator: With their friends? When we are looking at it, some of you brought up the point earlier and I think it was Becky, you said, "I do not want my kids to stand out in lunch, when we were in (state) nobody knew who was going through because they had the computer." And some of you were saying that they still had the little cards but now as they move up, it seems they are doing more with the computer. So looking at it socially, do you think it is still a good program?

Connie: Oh yes.

Becky: Absolutely.

Moderator: When the kids are taken out for Title I, let's say for the reading or math, I do not know this because you have to tell me because they did not have this program when I had little kids. Do they come in? Does your child feel like, oh wait a second everybody, they are taking me out to go to the tutor.

Connie: My son does, my son does for math.

Moderator: Okay.

Connie: For reading I made a mistake with his reading because he had it.

Moderator: Did he have it all the way through or did he just start when he got a little bit older?

Connie: On and off, it is hard because he is older, he will say I already know that stuff, he learned it in the classroom. He said they always show me stuff I already know. That is what his biggest thing is, “they already showed me stuff I already know.” That is when he gets upset.

Carla: With mine, he would just tell, he said, “I am going to the specials and special reading class because it is going to help me read better.” I mean he had no problem with it; really my kids really had no problem at all socially.

Moderator: Part of me wonders, because you had said yours started young and your children are younger, if getting special help earlier, when they are younger, would they have been used to it by the time they get to those ages when everybody kind of feels a little uncomfortable; you do not even think about it.

Becky: My question is you said how long was he going, I mean, why did he have to go for so long?

Connie: He has behavioral problems, my son did. He has always acted out like the class clown when he was in grade school.

Becky: So they were on him.

Connie: And he had a speech problem when he was younger and that was his way to act out, as the class clown to get everybody's attention.

Becky: Okay so were they taking him so that he would not distract everybody else?

Connie: No not really. He would just not be doing his work because he was so busy trying to get everybody's attention, and he should be straight A's in math, but he is not. He does everything in his head. You can ask her daughter how smart my kid is. But because of his behavioral problems he has an IEP and all that stuff. It is supposed to cut his work back, but it never has.

Becky: I was just wondering, I mean, because he is going that long and it was not helping, obviously it was not helping.

Connie: A lot of this is behavioral.

Moderator: But he seems to be learning what he needs to learn.

Connie: He should be a straight A student.

Moderator: Yes, I know.

Connie: Yes, his math teacher last year used to get so mad and give him bad grades because he would not put it on paper.

Moderator: I know they want to see how you get to the answer.

Connie: He would do it all in his head. The teacher gave him hard problems, by the time she walked around and sat down to show him how to do it, she said by the time she got there he had them done. I could not believe it. They

were so hard. She said he should be a straight A student. But it is behavioral mostly.

Moderator: Okay.

Becky: The thing is, okay, is he challenged? Because like I know with my little girl, they have a child, she is in third grade and they have a second grader that comes in and does their math with the third grade. She is like, "oh, I am going to work hard so I can go up with the next grade. I am going to work with the next grade."

Connie: I have had people say that I do not think maybe he is for it. That is what people say. Maybe he is for it.

Becky: If he is doing the stuff he is bored with if you have got it, there is no challenge, oh well, let's move on to the next thing. Challenge, I mean that is part of the educator's job.

Connie: We cannot seem to get his behavior under control.

Becky: It ties into challenge and maybe keeping him occupied.

Moderator: These are all good things that you are bringing up because I mean there are all kinds of ideas coming out.

Connie: We have tried everything with him over the years. We reward him.

Moderator: Instead of the negative rewards you do the positive?

Connie: You know, let's do this.

Becky: Don't they always attack you?

Connie: Oh, no, no, I know that.

Becky: I do not want you to think that at all.

Connie: We have done everything with him.

Moderator: And eventually it may be that it just clicks.

Connie: And it is starting to click now, but we had an incident with a teacher today that if something is not done, I am going to rip her lips off, if he is not taken out of that class.

Moderator: But you are working on it.

Connie: Oh, we are going to be working it real hard.

Moderator: Okay that is important.

Connie: You know, that is an action. Every day since the school year has started she has a problem with my son. And there is stuff like that, that goes on. I am not saying he is a perfect kid but God he ain't.

Carla: I see that a lot because when I go into the classroom and see what the teachers deal with, they tend to ignore the one that is the behavioral problem and go to the ones that are easier to deal with where the behavioral problem one is the one that needs the attention. Maybe if they do not need that much help, get one of the children who are a little more, a little more understanding of it to help those and the one with the problem.

Connie: But she is like always on him when she should not be always on him and just like really zoning in.

Carla: Well negatively I am talking let's do this problem together. Example, "Cindy, could you help while I am helping Connie?" Okay and that is what the teacher does and she takes Connie. "Connie we are going to go over this and Cindy is helping because Cindy is a little more, she is able

too, she gets it, she understands it,” that helps Cindy as a child because, oh man, I get to help somebody, that helps her because, “okay I want to be a good student because I want to help somebody” and they are working together. It teaches you to work together. If you set your standards, set the standards high they meet those standards. I tell my kids and people look at me, do not come home with a C. I do not want to accept C’s in my house. No C’s. You can go to class and sit in class and do the work in class and get a C. You come home and do your homework and do a little extra and you do not come home with C’s, and they do not. They do not have C’s. Now if they showed me okay they were C students I would be happy with C’s.

Connie: See, I would be happy with straight C’s.

Becky: My kids have showed me and I have expected, I set my standards very high. I set them high and they have to meet them, I mean I do not brutalize them over a C but hey you have to work.

5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.

Moderator: Tell me this ladies, the programs, how do they help you as parents?

Becky: They help me tremendously as far as the reading. They take the stress, I say, “What does it say,” that was at the beginning, no, no, it took the stress off of me. Like I said, I have other kids that say I need help doing this and I need help doing this and I need help doing this and I can only go with one person at a time.

Carla: It is hard when you are home by yourself and you have little ones and they want help and they are all in different grades.

Becky: Right, I have that same problem myself.

Carla: Like I said, I do, like I tell my oldest one, look, check her math for her while I do this. That does help but I still have to end up going over it and it just, it helps a lot; it helps a lot with time.

Connie: My son did that study hall where there is a teacher and they are talking to his teachers saying what homework he has like in supplemental.

Moderator: Someone that can help?

Connie: Yes, because that was one of his problems, he never brings his studies, I mean, his homework home. And that was okay when grade school was right down the street from me, I mean literally down the street but this is not right down the street. And, neither was (school) and so they kind of keep up with the teachers and find what he needs to be caught up and he has another study hall and I asked today if they could find out if they could get him into another one of those. So that really helps because he catches up a lot on his homework.

Moderator: So that is helping you?

Connie: Yes, right.

Moderator: I know Cindy brought up and I do not know if Connie did too about the cost, with the lunches it helps?

Connie: Yes, oh God, yes.

Carla: Honestly for me if it was not for the programs, the free lunch, free and reduced meals, they probably would not have lunch, seriously. I mean it gets that bad sometimes. I lost my job recently so we went from two incomes to one income and it is just not there, it is just not there. So if they did not provide that, yes, there probably would be a lot of times they would not eat at all.

Connie: I just had to put a waiver for school fees. And it is all because of my medical problem. I have a blood disease. I have sugar. I was in the doctor's office last month crying because they wanted me to go four weeks in a row for blood tests because I take a medical condition for my blood clots. Every time I go to the blood place it costs me \$43.00. They wanted me to go 4 weeks in a row. That is, my insurance only covers 80%. So that is \$43 for 4 weeks, I was crying in my doctor's office because that is \$180.00 in the hole this month they are putting me in. I cannot afford to put myself in the hole.

Moderator: Okay.

Connie: They have to monitor my medical condition all the time and so right now I am dropping my dental, my extra life insurance at the beginning of the year so that I can go to the higher insurance policy then it covers more but guess what? That is going up from \$62.00 to \$108.00 what I was paying for the whole stuff, the other stuff. So I am not saving anything. I am going to just have to lose my dental and my extra life insurance. It is going up to \$108.00 out of my paycheck every two weeks.

Moderator: So then having the food, not having to worry about it and then you have kids that are getting bigger they have more of an appetite.

Connie: He is growing out of a pair of shoes every month because he is at that age where he is eating me out of house and home. As tiny as he is but he is eating me out of house and home.

Moderator: Well he is a boy.

Connie: Growing like a weed.

Moderator: Yes, and Cindy you were saying that it helps you with your food budget.

Cindy: Well, yes but see like this is the first year that we have gotten reduced, I do not have medical. (Child) is on Healthy Start and I tell you when something happens to me I just, I mean I cannot go to the doctor. Excuse me but I had a urine infection about a month ago and there was nothing I could do about it.

Moderator: Did you go to the doctor?

Cindy: Well I had to go but I had this bill that I have to pay. I mean now I worry about, I know the reduced lunch is only 40 cents but there is only me in the household and my daughter, and we trying to work and pay the rent and utilities and I cannot even get medical for myself, so yes, it is a real struggle.

Becky: 40 cents is a big deal.

Cindy: Even paying that is a lot to me and I cannot understand but I did not fight the issue. I figured, well, because they go by your, I mean, gross and you do not even see that gross and they take, so they say I made to much

money and I just don't even, so I did not call up there and fight it or anything.

Becky: I have heard that too many times in my life, you make too much money, what does that mean?

Cindy: I know.

Becky: I have no clue what that means. It means for, at that moment for that program, what the bottom line is.

Connie: I had walking pneumonia twice last winter. I had to tell them to take my (possession) away because I cannot afford the payments, the insurance company does not pay. I am making payments on it out of my checking account every two weeks and when winter hits, I will be down.

Moderator: I work with a very specific population with very specific illnesses and I am always trying to figure out new ways to make things work. So I understand, I do not mean to minimize any of the health things. We will get through these questions and then maybe we can turn this off and if I have some ideas that can help you I will be glad to do that.

6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children's achievement in school? Please explain?

Moderator: Do you think that the programs that are here in the schools increase your child's achievement?

Cindy: Yes, especially math because like I said I do not understand the math and if they had something for every grade because my daughter does not seem to have any problem and like right now she has two study halls in a row

where she should not be sitting in these study halls. She should be in some kind of program helping her do math or whatever subject she is having trouble with because I believe right now the two study halls right in a row is causing a lot of problems.

Becky: Now is she in middle school?

Cindy: No she is in the junior high.

Becky: She is in junior high. So whose responsibility is it?

Cindy: No, it is probably me first to get her involved in it and then she will whine for about a week or two, and say, "Mom why did you do this?" But then she sees that it does help her.

Moderator: And you see that she is getting it?

Cindy: When she comes home and says mom, I tell my daughter I say, you know mom don't understand that, I do not know who to get and then she puts a lot of stress on me trying to figure this out. Now last year I did not have this problem because there was Title I math over there that she was able to do. But I have not found out yet if the junior high has anything to offer.

Moderator: So you need to do that.

Cindy: Yes.

Moderator: All right but what you have known in the past, you see that it helped her?

Cindy: Oh yes, yes, her grades were always better.

Moderator: How about any of you other ladies?

Carla: My daughter stays over like an hour every Tuesday. She gets extra help from her teacher, her special education teacher and she is improving. She

was needing help with rounding numbers off and well I was like, I do not remember how to do this. I asked her yesterday when I picked her up, I said, “do you feel like it is getting easier? Do you understand this more? You know, do you feel good about being there?” And she said “yes” it is starting to click for her.

Moderator: I think that is a good thing for you as a parent to ask her, do you see a difference. I think when they realize that they can see a difference because I think when they realize they can see it too it makes them feel as though they bought into the program a little bit more. You were saying that you talk to your children, making sure that the extra help that they are getting in this program, after school on Tuesday is beneficial to them and you thought that was a good thing to do. Okay, great. All right, anybody else?

Carla: I would say how I notice because they rush through it and so I do not think, it is like, okay, rush through it, so by the time it clicks with the kids, they are already on something else. It is like, okay, I hope you really know it when it comes to test time, slow down a little bit. I know they have to squeeze a whole bunch of stuff in a big rush, and the kids feel rushed. They just say, “Mom I have a test on this tomorrow.” Well I understand that, she gets it and it clicks but it is like okay it clicked and you are onto something else already. You do not give them a chance to really understand it, fully understand it.

Connie: I think that study hall thing works really well for him though.

Moderator: Where he gets the extra help in the study hall around the subject.

Connie: He tries to keep up with his teachers.

Moderator: I could call it a targeted study hall and I think that makes a lot of sense.

Connie: The other study hall teacher, he was acting up today, called me. I said isn't there another one you could get him in like the other study hall he is in.

Moderator: Yes, because he seems to pay attention.

Connie: It does not mean he pays attention perfectly but he is getting some work done in that, instead of just sitting around.

Moderator: It seems to be a more positive experience.

Connie: Yes.

7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children's performance in school?

Moderator: This is exactly where you want to be now in this next question. Ladies, okay, I am making you in charge. You are the ones who are in charge of this, okay, nobody else. What I want to know is what changes would you make in the programs to help the academic performance of your children and the others and when you say "I want to make this change," how do you see it helping them? How do you see them making that improvement in their performance in school?

Becky: I think with my daughter, she is in Title I, the thing that I would like to see is a follow-up and making sure that they are actually following through on their assignments. I know this and there was conversation about this on the phone today. I do not know if she just feels bad about not being able to

keep up with the other students. She just gets aggravated or mad; I do not know what is going on with her. I just know that she has a very difficult time. She is behind in her class and I really have to fight to get out what the assignments are. She has got her Title I teacher and then she has her homeroom teacher, okay, and she has her little assignment book that comes home and everything gets put in that book. She will sit there and tell me, "No, I don't really have to do that tonight." This is just optional and we go around and around and I need, I guess what I am trying to say is better communication with teachers and making sure that she really did need to do this tonight and she is really following through on it. I found out through the conversation today that she is turning around and going back in school and telling them that she is not doing assignments because her little sister got a hold of it and her little sister did this and that and this is not happening. So I need to find out why, I mean I am glad I made the call today but why did she feel the need to do that? Why is she feeling like she is not wanting to follow through on assignments? She has got this thing that because she goes to this special class now, that she does not have to worry about what is going on in homeroom, that does not concern her anymore, it is very frustrating. It really is.

Moderator: How would you do that? I am making you make, I am really challenging you here. How would you implement that program?

Becky: I think instead of having the one assignment book for her and she is going to be in the Title I program, then they should have their own special folder

or documentation of some sort that separates classes that has their assignments for that class separate from the homeroom stuff.

Moderator: Okay, so it is clear.

Becky: Right, instead of just putting my signature in one book and not knowing if she has gotten all of the assignments down and she is following through. Now I have got the book here for that, special education or whatever and then the homeroom, keep the line of communication open. It is a little frustrating, I mean, I just do not want to see her fall further behind than she is right now.

Moderator: You need some help to help. It makes total sense. Other ladies, come on make the changes in your program.

Cindy: Okay, starting with the breakfast and the student is to get breakfast, they should make the times when the students are here so that any student entitled to a free breakfast can come down and get a breakfast, be able to eat it and not have to be in stress to get to class. For lunch there should be somebody in the lunch line making the kids move it and not looking around for 15 minutes to see, do I want peanut butter or do I want chocolate chip or other choices. There are too many choices for lunch. The kids should be able to get a plate of food and sent on down the line so they can sit down and at least have 20 minutes of sitting down and eating instead of having only 10 minutes and swallowing their food. As for the Title I programs, my daughter has been working right along with the math. Last year, like I said, this year, I have not heard whatever they are doing in

the class, she was doing that in Title I and it was helping her. I feel that the following year when a student moves on it should be automatically notified in the next grade that this student was in the Title I program. This can still be offered to the student and, if so, be able to send a letter the first week saying, did you feel your daughter or son should be kept in this program? If so, fill this out, we can fit her in because we have this number of kids that need to go in instead of waiting for the parents to contact the school and say, "okay my daughter is having a problem in math. What do you have to offer?" Title I programs should be for every grade from kindergarten to 12th grade because I feel that this time the classes are over-filled and I do not feel the students are embarrassed anymore because there are so many kids involved in it and it should be offered for every grade, math, reading or whatever you have. Some kind of benefits of problem in the high school getting teachers to do this and there should be some students available every class to take that student into another room and work with them. Not play or goof around but have some students say, okay, I am here to help you with math or science or whatever subject that they are having and be able to do that.

Moderator: Like a peer tutor?

Cindy: Right, if they do not have the teachers to fill in.

Connie: I agree with everything they are saying and that study hall is a good program, but the teachers need to remember kids are kids, they are not little robots, and nowadays they are trying to cram so much into these

kids. I mean they are doing high school work that we used to do in 12th grade in sixth and seventh grade. They want them to grow up like little robots. They need to remember they are kids too. They want to have fun. School used to be fun and it is not getting that way anymore. They want your kids to be perfect. You have no control of your kids in the discipline area but when your kid does something they want you to be responsible. They just have to remember that kids are kids too.

Carla: For the Title classes I would say that we should be more on top of it. We should not wait, we should not see, it should not take a whole nine weeks to see that this child is struggling and they need help. After nine weeks, I mean that, it is too late. I mean it is not too late but I mean you should have seen it before the end of the nine weeks. After the third week of being in there you can see that this child is going to have problems and is going to need assistance. So for teachers to be more aware of the children that are in their class, I agree with you that it is kind of like, okay come in, do this, go on in. It is like they are not, it is not a personal relationship with the teachers and students.

Connie: We used to love, especially when we were in grade school, we used to love our teacher, and you remember your teacher when you grew up.

Cindy: But you got to remember the classes are overfilled.

Becky: I understand that but we came from a school, this was elementary, there were four of every grade and there were 30 plus children in each class and my kids and their teacher knew every one and knew about their parents

because parents came in and interacted with them and they interacted with the parents. They had e-mails sent, e-mails to the parents. Phone calls, phones in their rooms, the teacher would say, “Look I am calling right now!”

Connie: That is what I tell the teachers all the time. Call me. I do not want to hear when I get his interim or the report card that he has got a D or an F. Call me and tell me what he is doing everyday.

Becky: Do not wait until it is too late. If they need help, you need to know as an educator, you need to know, your children, you need to know them. Us as parents need to know. We need to see it also, okay, my kid is really struggling with this. I know as far as math, my fifth grader is doing algebra stuff.

8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?

Moderator: Every one of you are involved with your kids, I can see that. You are here, you know what is going on in school, and you participate in things. How would you get, what would you do, what changes would you make, what programs could you add, you want the teachers to know these children, okay, how do you get the parents that aren't you?

Becky: That is very difficult because I was so surprised when I came to a parent meeting. They combine the two schools together. Now did you realize how many kids are in these two schools together? There were only eight parents representing the two schools at a parent meeting.

Connie: I am not a parent that goes to PTA's and I have never been one of the parents that go to the PTA's and stuff. When they were in grade school I was at all the school functions.

Moderator: Well how do you get the other parents there?

Carla: My time is just as valuable as everybody else's time and I have just as much stuff to do as everybody else does. You can take a vacation day, a personal day to go have lunch with so and so and to go sit home, take a personal day of vacation. Parents have got, if you could see, I come in once a week, I cannot commit to volunteer my time because I babysit small children, so I cannot lug them in but I commit once a week. I come in and have lunch with my children and I spend three hours up here in lunch with a bunch of kids and to watch the kids and they say, "oh your mom is here" or "oh your mom is here and will you come outside with us, will you come out?" When we were in (state), I would go in to the classroom and I would be a classroom parent and be in there and the thing is the kids see that excitement and they do go home and tell their parent and it is a matter of okay look we need like eight people being at the PTA meeting. I do not come to the PTA meetings. I do not have time to come to the PTA meetings but my children; I make sure that I do for my kids. Like I said I volunteer my time to make sure that they are important and if you could get a setting to where they all do, where all the parents do come in, what did we just have the ice cream social where the parents came in for the conferences. Conferences, parents all sign up for those conferences,

you need as a teacher, we need to express as parents to each other, we need to express you have got to spend time with your kids. You got to go and volunteer. Give them some type of ideas, look I go and have lunch with my kids and you would be surprised that people say you have lunch with your kids. I asked my oldest, “When you are in junior high and I come popping up to lunch with you, are you going to be embarrassed?” He said, “No mom, no.” He said, “That is cool. I want you too.” So I will see what happens when he gets into junior high.

Cindy: We will see maybe that type of program should be offered here because I did not know that you could do that.

Connie: I didn't think.

Becky: Come to lunch with your kids.

Cindy: I do not know if you can come to lunch with your kids at the junior high. I would have no problem coming here with my daughter and she probably say, “oh no, my mom is here.”

Connie: (Name) would say, “don't you dare.”

Cindy: You know she would be okay about it so maybe some kind of program giving parents more of an opportunity to be part of the school except for coming to like the special events, have more times like pick some days of the week where the parents could come in.

Becky: Or just send a note home, look we have these hours. We need volunteers to come in and be a part of the class as parent aides. Come in and spend time in the classroom. Experience with the teacher, send a note home and

let the teachers be personal with the parents. It is, you are teaching my kids, my kids are your kids while they are in school and they come home and I am relying on you as an educator to educate my kids and I am trusting so I am hoping that we have a relationship. That is like a mother and father who do not have a relationship and splitting the kids up. I mean you got to have communication. You have to talk to the teachers and teachers have to talk to the parents. And it is not okay. Let her type letterhead that everybody gets. Make it personal.

Moderator: You would have some programs where, from what I am understanding, you would have programs where there would be times when parents could come in and just be in the classroom or even the lunchroom setting just to see what is going on. You would ask that parents come in and help and like a parent aide in the classroom whether that would be sitting with little (child) and helping her read because she needs that little bit of extra help or doing something like that.

Carla: Parents have to come in and do so many hours and I think that is just, I think that is perfect. It is mandatory.

Connie: What if the parents cannot do it. The parent works full time especially if it is a single parent.

Carla: Right, you are right.

Connie: Because like the kids, we had to ride the Head Start bus so many times a month; you had to take your turn and ride the Head Start bus.

Carla: You are right, you are right and there are some exceptions to the rule but a lot of these people just do not do it. They just do not do it, and I will come in, I love my kids, my little kids in here to come in and help. I will do it. I have no problem doing it at all because of my kids.

Connie: I used to go on the Head Start bus when it was my turn. My mom used to come over and watch my daughter because my son had to go first because he had a speech problem. They did not have room for him but he had a speech problem.

Moderator: But you worked it out. What you are saying is we were able to do it. We encourage other parents to do it too, participate.

Carla: This has nothing to do with Title I or whatever, now that you are talking about what you can do to have people come in, be involved with your kids.

Moderator: Yes, if you were in charge.

Becky: I have had my ex-husband a couple of time, even my mother who lives in (community), who likes to come out at Christmas time to see the programs and stuff, very irate because they have to call off work in order to see a program that is being held and the question they have asked me which I could not answer is, "why don't they have these things in the evening like they used to do when we were kids?"

Moderator: Some of them do.

Becky: Why do they hold their Christmas shows or a lot of the events seem to be during hours that people are working and in order to attend you have to call off work to go.

Moderator: I think that is something you certainly should check into, check in with your building. I do not know how it is here. I know that we have a lot of programs in the district that I am in that were at night.

Connie: Yes, see ours are at night or day.

Moderator: You might want to check and find out what options are there to participate in that program because I understand you wanting in, sure parents want to come.

Becky: Well there were a couple of times their father was not able to come because he could not call off work to go and that is disappointing to the kids.

Moderator: Sure it is.

Connie: Nowadays, you cannot.

Becky: You know, but the Christmas program.

Moderator: I would check and ask.

Becky: There are other things throughout the year, things that they schedule them during the day. Like at the end of the year they have like that picnic thing that they do where they play games and they have people come up and have field days or whatever. But if you are a parent working during the day you cannot be expected to lose a day of pay, but at the same time you want to be there for your child.

Moderator: Do the field day, but yes, maybe one year do one thing and do another the next.

Becky: Maybe try to schedule more things in the evening or maybe get to know the people individually. Maybe there are some people that will work the evening shift and the day, I guess it is just an individual thing, I do not know, I mean, the other thing for me as far as like coming in to things, advance notice is wonderful. Everything is being sent home a week or two ahead of time so you can actually sit down and schedule it and make sure you can actually be there, it is a good thing, it is a really good thing.

Moderator: I agree with you that is a really important. Making sure, because I mean I know what it is like. I have been working all my life.

Connie: My kids also went to latchkey. That was a good program.

Moderator: Okay.

Connie: That was wonderful. I had a private babysitter for a few years. Then the last three years they went to latchkey.

Moderator: You liked that?

Connie: Yes, that could be costly but I mean first taking the kids to a babysitter, take the coat and gloves off, they put it back on when the bus comes, do the same thing at school and the same thing at night, latchkey was a beautiful program. Beautiful program.

Moderator: We are getting some ideas, this is important.

9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?

Moderator: If we did have these programs, who should coordinate them, who is in charge?

Cindy: Well I think for the middle school and the high school and things I believe that it should be the guidance counselor who should because they had the schedule of the kids and then the teachers; having a student refer them to the guidance counselor and then the guidance counselor can place them and see, okay your daughter here has two study halls right in a row. Why don't we put her in one of the programs?

Moderator: Okay ladies, who should coordinate the programs? What time should they be? How would you put them? Would you put some of these things before school, after school, during school? You were talking about additional help for the children. You had talked earlier about peer helpers and tutors, where a child knows how to do it. How do you do that?

Cindy: I would say during school because there are a lot of times when transportation; if a parent is working until 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening they do not want to have to worry about going to go pick their child up at school. This way if it is during school, they will be home at the regular time because there are a lot of students who do have one or two study halls during the day or maybe could be shortened like say if a student does not have that opportunity instead they had math. Maybe split the math class up

and let the child because they will be doing the same thing that they are doing in class. They are just getting the extra one-on-one help. So I think during school.

Moderator: Other ideas.

Connie: During their study hall, give it during their study hall.

Moderator: Okay, you like the idea of the targeted study hall if kids need a little bit of extra help.

Connie: Yes.

Becky: What was the question again?

Moderator: Okay of these programs that you would like to see implemented, who should be in charge? When should they occur? During the day are they before school or after school, where should they take place?

Carla: I think, it is just too hard to say during or after, I think it really depends on the family, how that family, I mean not everybody works during the day.

Moderator: Okay so make this work. See this is the challenge. Families are working, working different shifts. You make it work. How would you make it work? See these are the things that we are trying to do, brainstorm, get these ideas.

Carla: I think it should be available, the help should be available before school for those parents that can bring their kids in early, come in 45 minutes earlier, if it is not teacher A then it is teacher B, okay it may not be your regular math teacher that is helping you. It may be another math teacher that is helping you. That is another, I mean, these teachers need the

parents, maybe it is your teaching skill that these children are picking up on or somebody is not picking up so they need another. So, come early in the morning or after school. Now during school, that is school hours, okay, you have your social studies, your own study hall, I think that is awesome, the targeted study halls. I think that is awesome and that should go on during school when the kids have their study hall. I call it study hall, he only gets 30 minutes, at the end of school but I mean they can work it into their schedule that 30 minutes then that should be during school and then after school. But really to pull them out of a class that is already going on that goes with, okay, if they had this homework and you had to separate the two. Well if they have it either 45 minutes before or 45 minutes after then this time right here is school time. This is school time. This is, it is totally separate from these two and then you have two separate. So either you come in early or you come in late.

Becky: My cousin was telling me that her child is in special programs as well. She said the way they had it worked up at their school is he has the option of coming in an hour early before school starts and work on what he is having problems with. So I mean that is an option I guess, having the kids come in an hour early. I mean I do not know if that would work. I guess it works for them.

Moderator: But that is the idea. You said a very critical word, "option." Yes, families are very different and I think everyone of you has pointed that out because you said families, single parents, married parents, parents that are

divorced, parents that are separated, parents that work two different shifts so you have all these different kinds of families and you have to have the options.

Becky: The options are there and if they are important enough you are going to make provisions to use those options.

Moderator: Exactly.

Becky: If it is important enough to you. I mean we make, we squeeze an extra hour into 24 hours when it is important to us.

Moderator: Exactly, exactly, exactly. So this is good. You guys have come up with great ideas and see now you are thinking because lots of times people think it is real easy. Just do this but when you all of a sudden are challenged, you have to think, it makes you realize, wait a second, sure and then those of you at this table also you have participated so you see the difference and you can see some of the challenges that are happening so I think you are coming up with great things here.

10. As a parent what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

Moderator: As a parent what do you see as your child's greatest advantage in school and what is their greatest difficulty?

Carla: I think the use of the computers.

Moderator: Is that a disadvantage or an advantage? I am trying to clarify.

Carla: It is an advantage because it seems like these days everything revolves around computers; they did not do that sort of thing when I was in school.

I mean I do not even know if there were computers to tell you the truth.

Moderator: I don't even know how to turn one on.

Carla: I mean we just did not even do stuff like that.

Connie: I do not have one at home.

Carla: My daughter is in first grade and they do reading programs and stuff. Computers are right in their classroom that just blows me away. So I think that is a wonderful thing and I noticed that my kids over the years every school they have attended there has been rooms where they went with computers and they can sit down and they could do if it was math then math. The math could be put on there and they really enjoy working with it. They learn how to use it properly, where you could sit me in front of a computer, I would not know what to do. They are prepared for this so that maybe when they are out in the world this is not going to be a big deal for them. For me it would be. I mean, if you put me, I would not know what to do. I just think it is wonderful that they have computers and they could do all the programs through the computers. Disadvantage, difficulty, the only difficulties that my kids have is they are extremely shy people, very shy. They do not speak up. They kind of fall back in the shadows a little and I am always the one who has to get in there and I think that it gets, the kids kind of pick out on that they are kind of shy and with them

not speaking up I think they kind of get overlooked at times in class and stuff so that would be their biggest disadvantage.

Moderator: Connie how about you?

Connie: (Name) biggest disadvantage is that he, his behavioral problems and he gets flared up and kids know how to push his buttons and as small as he is he is not one to back down. He just goes right back and that is my biggest concern with him, they push his buttons and he flares right back. His advantage is, he is a good kid. He is a smart kid even though his grades do not show it but anyone of his teachers will tell you; he is very smart it is his behavioral problem. About this study hall thing that he is in I wish I could get him in this other study hall. I do not know if one is available for the other one. He has four male teachers which I was just absolutely grateful to when I found out he had four male teachers. He does seem to do better with male teachers, and they tell them be strict with him, be firm.

Moderator: So his advantages and difficulties?

Connie: I think he is starting to get to that point, he is starting like I have one of my old supervisors. His son is just like my son was and he said, "Connie he is getting to that age where they start clicking. (Child) used to be the same way, takes the medicine, everything, straight D's, F's now he is in high school and he gets straight A's" and he knows it is going to happen with him and that is what I am praying for, I am waiting.

Moderator: How about your daughter?

Connie: She is like a straight A, B student. Now she just got two low grades on her interims but she is taking college prep courses. It is getting harder but she is straight A's and B's and there is a conflict between them being twins. He is one year behind and it is always that friction right there. My life would be perfect without, well, you have been with her for 14 and half years and like last year and it is a fight and she tells him all the time "You are smarter than me, you don't understand." His math teacher from last year told the principal this year, first day of school, "I miss my buddy," he misses him.

Moderator: Good, make sure you tell him that.

Connie: Oh, I did, I said (teacher) missed you the first day of school, he told the principal he missed you. Now what does that say, but just behave in class, that is all I ask. I am not asking you to go to Harvard some day.

Moderator: All right, always aim high.

Cindy: Oh, I do not know how to answer the question.

Moderator: Yes, you told me your child had an advantage already, Cindy. Your daughter did. You said you thought the advantage was the Title I math program because it did not allow her to fall behind, it allowed her to go ahead. Do you have anything you think she has difficulty with? And I do not mean just in the classroom. I mean things that you see that are difficult in school for kids to handle. You mentioned their being shy.

Cindy: Well, (child) is not shy. It is just being here. There are a lot more kids and it is overwhelming to her.

- Connie:** There is peer pressure; there is so much peer pressure.
- Cindy:** Actually I think sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth graders tend to like fall back, goof off more until they get into the high school then they like snap or something and they are ready. So her disadvantage is getting involved with kids she should not be involved in and slacking off.
- Moderator:** So that is it. Okay. I am watching you; you are going up to the top of your head.
- Carla:** I am because, that question really has me stumped. My kids are really outgoing. They get along with everybody. Whenever they can help, they are helping. The advantage is that they are allowed to help, the teachers allow them to help. So I would say that is an advantage. Difficulty, I really do not think they have any difficulties I really do not. If they do, they hide it well and they are not telling me.
- Moderator:** So I am totally in the dark. Exactly. Okay, how do you feel about participating, go ahead I am sorry.
- Connie:** I just think there is so much peer pressure out there. Kids dress this way and have the clothes. My daughter says I never go to the mall. She went the other week with her friend and their aunt.
- Becky:** Oh, I would love to see the schools go to uniform.
- Carla:** Absolutely, I would really love that.
- Connie:** My friends go to the mall, my friends go to the mall all the time, and they hang out at the mall. Their parents take them.

- Becky:** If the kids go to uniforms the teachers have to model it, they need to be uniformed also.
- Connie:** If their parents are taking them to the mall I would let them live at the mall. They are sending them the wrong message. They are just dropping them off there to let, to have a babysitter. You do not drop your kid off at the mall and let them spend hours and hours there. I do not care if you are 14, 15, or 16. They are not paying attention to what their kid is doing, because all her friends hang out at the mall and they go there and spend hours there and their parents let them stay there. I said that is crazy.
- Becky:** I would think that as far as being a disadvantage not for my kid, what I would say is a disadvantage for some kids because they are going to school and her getting a, oh well, what you do not have on Jordache jeans so you don't, so I would say that is a disadvantage.
- Carla:** That is a wonderful point that she brought up because when I was in school it was the same thing, if you did not have, then it was Levi jeans, if you did not wear a pair of Levi jeans you were just, you were nothing. My daughter is doing the same. I cannot afford to spend \$20.00 or \$25.00 on one pair of blue jeans.
- Becky:** \$25.00! \$60.00!
- Connie:** Kohl's you got to go to Kohl's. I like Kohl's because you can get sales.
- Carla:** You go to Gabrielle Brothers, \$5.00. No, but I cannot afford it. I mean when I was younger, very young, in the lower grades, I went to Catholic school and we always wore uniforms and there were no comparisons.

- Becky:** That is a very good point. I would like to see them do that. Blue Khaki, so you do not have to worry.
- Connie:** And another thing at sports, my daughter would love to be a majorette, \$285.00 just to get her started in that. Where are all these tax dollars going from with the Ohio Lottery. My kids will never be able unless daddy helps extra. God forbid my son asks for a handful of peanuts at daddy's house last weekend, a \$3.00 can of peanuts, he says we pay your child support; don't you give him an allowance?
- Moderator:** So you would say for some of the kids financially being able to participate in some of the programs.
- Connie:** It is ungodly.
- Carla:** When you have to do that pay to play.
- Cindy:** Cheerleading is very expensive too.
- Connie:** She wanted to start it last year, she dropped it, she knew I was so upset about \$285.00.
- Cindy:** There is no financial aid or anything for school.
- Cindy:** No.
- Moderator:** That is an idea.
- Becky:** Financial aid for sports, you cannot pay, you cannot punish kids that cannot pay to play for sports.
- Moderator:** Okay, then create the program.
- Carla:** Why can't it be the same as like the lunch or the reduced lunch, go by the person?

Becky: That is a good thing, go by the kid's income. But I just want to know why.

Carla: The program should be available to all people.

Moderator: I am going to be the devils advocate here now, ladies. Who is going to pay for that?

Connie: Where is all our money going from the Ohio Lottery? All these school fees!

Moderator: Maybe from the lottery? Have you ever heard, those of you that know the school district that my kids were in, the boosters did it but you had very active booster groups and they did an awful lot of different things to raise funds so that they could pay.

Becky: I get bombarded, I have three kids and they come home with all these fundraisers and they bring home three fundraisers at one time.

Connie: Sell 100 of these and 200 and 500 and you get to ride in a limo. I think that is terrible what they put on the kids with these fundraisers.

Moderator: We may not have perfect answers.

Carla: As far as pay to play you base it off of income you do the scholarships.

Connie: I mean it is not like you have to do it for 100 kids, because I mean like cheerleading, majorettes and the football. It is not like a lot of kids.

Carla: Also, I mean if you have, I know you have to keep the good grades too, good GPA to participate in it but I mean reward them with, okay what we are getting is because your GPA has been good.

Moderator: That is a good point.

Becky: What about like my daughter she does have learning disabilities but she is putting her best foot forward most of the time and like in her school they have the kids are running for president and vice-president and treasurer but it says right on the paper, they brought home a permission slip asking if they could do this or not, that they had to have a certain grade level to participate in that. She sat down and wrote down all these reasons why she would be good to do this and I did not see the final print until she was all done with that, I did not have the heart to tell her that you cannot participate in this because your grades are below. Isn't there something else, I mean if their grades are not?

Connie: Yes, not to be so, maybe.

Becky: There should be.

Connie: I mean it should be a high C, but what do you say about all of these guys that are going to be basketball stars and football stars and cannot even read.

Becky: It just does not seem right to say you cannot participate because your grades are not up there.

Moderator: Make it change.

Becky: Well I mean it is important, there needs to be something that would not interfere with that person's school work, the special education kids that they could still, maybe pass things out. Maybe instead of running for president they could just be like a helper to that person, maybe like help pass out things. Yes, something so that they are involved in the activity

that is going on but not to a point that it is going, to distract them from what they are supposed to be learning, you know what I am saying.

Moderator: Yes, that is a good idea.

11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Moderator: Okay ladies, last question. How did you like doing this?

Connie: It was not bad at all. I learned a lot.

Moderator: Okay, I think you are all very bright women. You obviously participate with your kids. If we all go out and recruit, it used to be if you all go out and recruit one friend and bring them in then they will be able to do it and then they get a friend and the next thing you know things begin to work but you have had good ideas and I would stay involved with your kids. It really makes a difference.

Becky: Oh it does.

Moderator: And you know that because you have already said that, because you know what is going on you are staying on top of it. So thanks and I know the researcher thanks you.

Moderator: Okay, we had an additional idea and so we are going to add it.

Becky: As far as the pay to play sports you can get sponsors, companies to sponsor. You can get companies to sponsor, I mean you get them to sponsor these little leagues, you can get them to sponsor the high school kids, but this is all we need so much money from you. The nuclear power plant, Wal-Mart, you can get these companies to sponsor the kids.

Cindy: Excellent idea, excellent.

Moderator: Anything else ladies?

Cindy: We have enough businesses here in the school district that probably would like to participate.

Becky: It is a tax write off for them.

Cindy: It is not like they are just giving their money away, they know that it is going for the school. An excellent idea!

Moderator: All right, I think we are finished.

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview 4 (one participant): 10/11/2003

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school districts do your children attend (what grade are your children in)?

Moderator: Okay, we are going to start. Donna was the only one who could participate today so we are going to ask these questions and Donna is going to give her best answers. Now, Donna, could you tell us how many children you have and in which school district your kids go to school?

Donna: One, at (school) Junior High.

2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have they participated in the program(s)?

Moderator: Does your child participate in the federal programs for lunch, for breakfast, for Title I math or reading?

Donna: For lunch.

Moderator: For lunch, how many years approximately has she participated in the lunch program?

Donna: Eight.

3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: How do you feel about your child participating in these programs?

Donna: It is very helpful for me actually and she gets good lunches.

Moderator: Did you want your child to participate in this?

Donna: Yes.

4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.

Moderator: What benefits do you see for your child academically, socially or otherwise as a result of her participating in these programs?

Donna: Academically she was in the tutoring before which helped her, she does not need it currently. Lunch helps for her nutrition because she is not a good eater. I know she is getting a good meal.

5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.

Moderator: How does it help you as a parent with any of the programs that she is participating in?

Donna: Because she works better with other people than with me. The school work she will argue; and then with food I know she is getting a basic square meal with the lunch program because they just cannot go get the junk food like kids that do not have that kind of program.

6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children's achievement in school? Please explain?

Moderator: Do you think these programs help to support and increase your child's achievement in school and how would you explain that? Give us some examples.

Donna: Well, she has got the right nutrition so she stays awake more in class because she has a good meal in her; then from the other foods that the kids that do not have the lunch program. Other kids eat a lot of the fatty foods like french fries or whatever or won't eat at all so they will fall asleep quicker in class.

Moderator: Does your school have a breakfast program?

Donna: Not to my knowledge, but she did go to a school before that did have a breakfast program and she did go to breakfast and it helped.

Moderator: Okay was that during elementary or when?

Donna: Yes, elementary, she did go to the breakfast they had cereals and different things like that.

Moderator: And you thought that was helpful as well?

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: I know that you have been pretty active in the school with parent organizations and stuff like that, could you give us any feedback that you might have received by just participating that way, things that you heard at some of the meetings or information that you might have received from other parents about any of the programs?

Donna: The main thing was kids do not have enough time to eat. I mean they have the full meal that they are supposed too, but they do not have time to eat it.

Because they will have to go at the end of the line because the other kids have to go first, just the packers, like the packers will go first. They will just get the milk, so they go through first and then the kids, some places will have where the kids that are paying, they will go next and then the kids with the free lunches will go behind. Sometimes they will mix them all in and the main thing is that they do not have time to eat it all because by the time all the kids are served they are only getting five minutes to eat. You cannot eat all the food that meet the guidelines, the kids throw it out because they cannot save it for later or elementary kids they have to go right out to recess so the food gets thrown out.

Moderator: How do they do it in your daughter's school now? I mean how does anybody know, is there any discrimination that you are aware of?

Donna: No.

Moderator: Do people identify who has free meals?

Donna: At (school) junior high it is nice because they all have like a credit card with a picture I.D. and it is all scanned through, so nobody knows who is getting free food, who is charging, who has to pay. The only difference is you have a packed lunch or not. So that part I really like.

Moderator: Yes, that makes it easier I am sure.

7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children's performance in school?

Moderator: Okay, we are going to make you the person in charge. No you are good at this, you are really good at this. Don't make that face. So, you are the person now that is in charge of some of these programs. Because I know that even though your daughter may not have been in all the programs, she has participated in some of them and being active in the schools you have obviously heard about them. Thinking about these programs we have talked about, like the lunch program, the breakfast program, Title I reading or math, being in charge, what changes would you make?

Donna: The biggest change I would make is having more time for the kids to eat. Having all the schools go to the photo I.D. where there is no money being exchanged and the kids cannot tell who is getting free lunches and who is not. There are kids that won't get it because they are afraid of being picked-on when the kids that are already being picked-on it is just another thing to get picked on at some places. So I would go to the cards and somehow make more time for the kids to eat.

Moderator: Okay, how would you, I mean you need to do the programs, I know this is the hard part but I know you are good and you can come up with a lot of this.

Donna: Maybe have two rows of food serving instead of just one so that the kids could get through quicker. Have a special line just for the milk for the packers so they do not hold up the line; have the I.D. card so they just get swiped so it does not tie up the money; then the line that has people paying with actual cash and having to do change and all of that. Plus it

would keep down the fact of kids stealing money from kids or kids saying let me borrow this for lunch money or whatever. Every student would have an I.D. card.

Moderator: See those are really good ideas and believe it or not those are not ideas that have already come up, that is why it is so amazing to get all this feedback. You have given the fact that kids do not have to worry about carrying money. That is great and you do not have to worry about that change. It can be something as simple as instead of one line having two.

Donna: Yes, because like most of the grades have an average of 60 to 80 kids and by the time that 80th goes through the line you are only getting; some schools only get 20 minutes for lunch. If it is going to take that much time, of course they are only going to have a couple of minutes to eat and they cannot stay because either they have to go to their class or go to recess. So if they had the two lines, things get through quicker and they get at least 10 minutes to eat.

Moderator: Now I do not know if your daughter has participated in any of the tutoring programs.

Donna: Yes, she did.

Moderator: Okay, how did that work?

Donna: We got blessed with a good teacher that really took the time. I know the one, there is one teacher in (school) system that is past retirement age and the principal even lets her babysit her granddaughter during school so the kids are not getting the education that they need because she is playing

with her little granddaughter and they need to be watched. These kids need tutoring help so they need to have better educated people to really work with them. With the math tutoring she was in I think it was two years and she has caught up to where she is supposed to be to where she does not need a tutor now. So I got blessed with that part, and there is a waiting list in some schools for tutoring, it all depends on who you get. I think it was halfway through the year that she was caught up to where she should be and she was taken out and then another kid got to go in. So maybe another tutor, if there is one school that has a lot of kids that need the extra help.

Moderator: So that is what you would change.

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: Did you hear anything from other parents while you were doing your PTA work and stuff like that? Anything that they were saying about the programs?

Donna: The main things that I have heard was about the lunches, kids not having enough lunch time and they were not allowed to stay and eat their lunch if they were at the end of the line because they had to get out so they can run it off outside. But I think their nutrition is better, more important than running outside for 20 minutes. So if they did the lines they would have more time to eat. And then with the tutoring, develop some kind of different programs to where more kids could be helped that need it.

8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?

Moderator: So if you were in charge still, what additional or new programs do not worry about the money let's say they are coming locally, federally, from the state, whatever, would you like to see offered to the kids to make them more successful?

Donna: More tutors hired maybe even have an after school program for kids that want to come in or they have a waiting list to make it for them to have time to come in.

Moderator: So what you are saying is the child who may, because the fact that there is actually a shortage of the tutors, some days after school there would be some kind of volunteers?

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: So the kid who is on the list could come in, until such time as they get the material.

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: Who do you think those volunteers should be? I mean this is your program so you can make it work.

Donna: Even some high school kids that are in advanced classes could volunteer time or some retired teachers because a lot of them are looking for things to do sometimes or want to give back. Not just anyone off the street, somebody that really knows and that could really help the kids with what they are struggling with.

Moderator: I think those are good points that you said, it just cannot be anybody, but yes, utilize people who might want to do it. I like the idea that you said

about utilizing the kids that are in the AT classes or kids that are in the advanced placement classes in the high school. A lot of schools, and I do not know if your school system has programs where kids have to do community service before they can graduate.

Donna: Yes, do it for community service.

Moderator: Sure, yes, have kids that are already academically qualified help students who are struggling.

9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?

Moderator: Where would you have these programs take place?

Donna: After school.

Moderator: Yes, tell about the time and tell about the setting if you do not mind.

Donna: Either after school, like right after school for maybe an hour or a library that would have a special room closed off so there was not a lot of distraction since it is a quiet place.

Moderator: Okay, good ideas, so your hours would be right after school is what you are saying.

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: All right.

Donna: Because a lot of times for transportation purposes parents are at work.

Moderator: Yes that is a good thought so they did not have to go any place. As a parent, this is something that you may have to give some thought too.

10. As a parent what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

Moderator: As a parent, what do you see as your child's greatest advantage in school and I am also going to ask you what do you see as the greatest difficulty? But let's go with the advantage first.

Donna: Being in the school.

Moderator: Yes, what do you see as the greatest advantage?

Donna: Compared to like home school?

Moderator: You could put it anyway you want. This is just a question. As a parent, what do you see as your child's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?

Donna: I would say advantage if you look at it like a home school, the advantages that the kids are getting more, I believe they learn more in school, they learn to work with people compared to kids that are home schooled. They do not have the connection or are developing how to work with others. The advantages would be working with more people. Learning to get along with a lot of different people for the future like working in a job. Where I think home schooled kids they would have more difficulty getting a job since they were not around a lot of people, they did not learn how to work things out, things like that.

Moderator: So you think just being around of number of diverse people helps your child. That is one of the advantages that she has had in school. What has been one of her greatest difficulties?

Donna: Getting up in the morning. I mean having school start too early in the morning; I mean she is supposed to be at school and in class at 20 after 7. How many kids are really alert that early in the morning? I have seen all of her classes that she has had that first class in the morning, she is not awake and her grades show it. She will have horrible grades.

Moderator: For the first class?

Donna: For the first class.

Moderator: Are you saying then that you see something different in the class that starts about 10:30?

Donna: Yes.

Moderator: Okay.

Donna: She is more awake and more alert and she has time to open her mind and her grades are so much better in classes that are in the afternoon.

Moderator: That is a super point. Believe it or not, you are the first one out of the groups that I have conducted that have picked up on that and there is a lot of research that they are doing now that shows that teenagers, and I know your daughter is a teenager, really do need more sleep than we realize and perhaps that is one of the things that we need to look at so I think that is a really good point on your part.

Donna: I mean for my child anyhow, when she comes home from school a lot of times she just goes right back to bed for an hour because she is so tired from the day. They are getting out, she gets out at quarter to two in the

afternoon. They need to change the dates, not the dates, the times of the school day.

Moderator: Donna I know that you are a stay at home mom, and I know that right now in your own home situation you are also considering taking care of another child who has come from a pretty dysfunctional family. I see it is interesting that you brought up the school hours because I know quarter to two in the afternoon is kind of early. You are home, what do you think happens to some of those kids that come home at that hour?

Donna: Parents are not there, there is no adult supervision and they are just hitting the streets and getting into trouble and that is the big thing. I will meet you here at such and such a street and we will just hang out. So I think there is more, tons of kids that are unsupervised, parents will think they are home or whatever and there will be more kids going to their house that are not realizing it and it might be one reason that the teen pregnancy levels are up. You say “no boys or girls over when we are not home” but parents are at work so, “oh no, nobody was here” but so and so is pregnant and I know my kids they, the one that I am taking off the street, she is like “it is so nice to come home to somebody. Knowing that somebody is going to be home when I get home,” and I make them do their homework right off the bat and make sure they eat. They have curfews, earlier than what the city curfew, like the city curfew is 10:00. Well with me their curfew is 7:30, 8:00. They have to be home, getting clothes laid out for tomorrow, figure it out and have some family time to talk about what is going on. So kids

nowadays do not have that because parents are working so much. Some parents are working two jobs.

Moderator: What do you think about, you have a couple of programs that you were saying might go after school. Do you think that might fit in anywhere with the concerns that you voiced?

Donna: Yes, they need to develop some kind of place for the kids to go where the kids need help with homework or something. I know (school district), I do not know if they still have it. A couple of years ago they had a thing where if the kids needed help, they would do that while the other kids played. They had their work done but the kids were not on the street and they were supervised.

Moderator: And this took place where?

Donna: At (community) Recreation Center.

Moderator: At a recreation center?

Donna: Right. At old city hall and I think there are more towns that need places like that. I mean even for the teenagers, I mean sometimes towns will have centers but for younger kids and not try to attract the older kids. Here in (community) we have Friday nights what is called "The Quarter" one of the churches has what is called "The Quarter." In the beginning they get together, it is not like church. It is more like a youth group thing for the first part and the second part the kids play board games or sit and talk or listen to music, play pool, and the kids love it there. I mean they have to check in, they would keep names, what time they got there. They do not

leave and come back. They cannot do that. They have to stay there for a couple of hours. The kids, even the bad kids that cause a lot of trouble in the street, they are there and they are not getting into trouble, they are talking about if they can get more support and that, they will be there every night, it would be great. Because there are no drugs, no kids like over 18 are allowed there so you do not have that influence and the kids just love it.

Moderator: So could you foresee putting the tutors in those programs that might be taking place during the week? Friday night would be tough because I think everybody kind of looks forward to relaxing.

Donna: Yes, maybe a different night during the week, they could have the tutors and then if they want to sit through the youth part and then go into the social part.

Moderator: Tell me this. What is your daughter's most difficult thing in school?

Donna: Getting to school in the morning.

Moderator: Still the morning.

Donna: Getting her awake.

Moderator: Getting her awake.

11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Moderator: How do you feel about having to participate in this?

Donna: Good, because it is an idea that maybe somebody will be able to do something about the research.

Moderator: That is right. Thanks. We appreciate that.

Appendix E
Informed Consent Form

A STUDY TO GAIN PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES REGARDING POVERTY-
BASED PROGRAMS IN WHICH THEIR CHILDREN PARTICIPATE

Dear Parent,

I am conducting a study to gain parental perspectives regarding poverty-based programs in which their children participate. In this study, which is based on focus group interviews, you will be asked to respond to questions and provide perspectives concerning education and supplemental programs in which your child participates. Your participation in this research should take about ninety (90) to one-hundred and twenty (120) minutes.

There are no risks to you or your child due to your participation in this study.

All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner, so that no one will be able to identify you or your child when the results are recorded/reported. The videotape and information gained from this study will be used for the purpose of focus group research. Information from this research will be included in a dissertation and may be included in professional article(s), but no one individual will be identified.

Your non-compensated participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during this study simply notify Gail Anderson at (440) 350-2437.

Please feel free to contact Michael Shoaf, co-researcher at (440) 286-3076, or Glorianne Leck, principal researcher at (330) 747-8776, if you have any questions about the study.

Your participation in this focus group study is greatly appreciated and will add to the current knowledge of the researcher and to the field of education.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am eighteen (18) years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Signature of Participant

Date

Source: Youngstown State University, Human Subjects Research Committee, Sample Informed Consent. (9/30/02)

Appendix F

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many children do you have (boys, girls, ages)? Which school districts do your children attend (what grade are your children in)?
2. In what federal programs do your children participate (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps) that are meant to support success in school? How many years have they participated in the program(s)?
3. How do you feel about your children participating in federally based programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Title I reading or math, before or after school programs, food stamps)? Do you want your children to participate in these programs? Please explain.
4. What benefit(s) do you see for your children, academically, socially, or otherwise, as a result of their participation in these programs? Please explain.
5. How have these programs helped you as a parent? (How do these programs help you as a parent help your children?) Please explain.
6. How do these programs help support an increase in your children's achievement in school? Please explain.
7. If you were in charge, what changes, if any, in these programs would you make to help the academic performance of your children? How would these changes improve your children's performance in school?
8. What additional or new programs (local, state, and/or federal) would you like to see offered to help make your children more successful in school?

9. With these additional or new programs you mentioned, who should coordinate them? What times should these programs be offered (before school, during the school day, after school hours)? Where should they take place?
10. As a parent what do you see as your children's greatest advantage and greatest difficulty in school?
11. How do you feel about participating in this interview process?

Appendix G

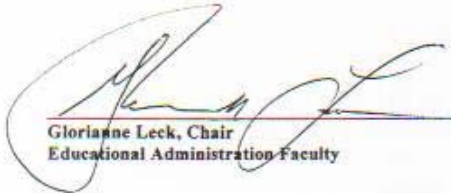


Educational Administration, Research, and Foundations

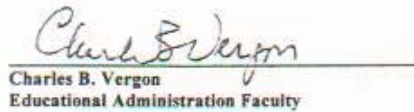
Youngstown State University / One University Plaza / Youngstown, Ohio 44555-0001

Approval of Dissertation Proposal of Mr. Michael Shoaf
Candidate for Ed.D. in Educational Leadership

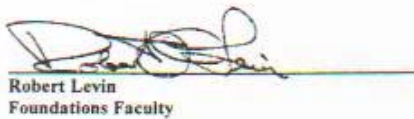
On September 25, 2003 the following members of the Graduate Faculty, sitting as the Dissertation Advisory Committee to doctoral candidate Mr. Michael Shoaf, participated in his oral defense and approved his proposal for dissertation studies. The approved proposal is entitled "*Parental Perspectives Regarding Poverty Based Programs In Which Their Children Participate.*"



Gloriayne Leck, Chair
Educational Administration Faculty



Charles B. Vergon
Educational Administration Faculty



Robert Levin
Foundations Faculty



Paula Britton
Counseling and Human Services Faculty
John Carroll University

Appendix H



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September 26, 2003

Dr. Glorianne Leck, Principal Investigator
Mr. Michael Shoaf, Co-investigator
Department of Educational Administration, Research, and Foundations
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol #27-2004

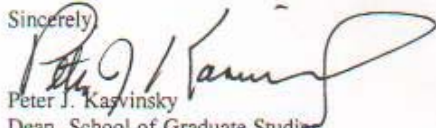
Dear Dr. Leck and Mr. Shoaf:

The Human Subjects Research Committee has reviewed the abovementioned protocol titled "Parental Perspectives Regarding Poverty Based Programs in Which Their Children Participate," and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 5 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

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

Sincerely,


Peter J. Kasvinsky
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Research Compliance Officer

PJK/cc

c: Dr. Robert Beebe, Chair
Department of Educational Administration, Research, and Foundations