Challenges of Student Teachers Placed in Poverty K12 Schools

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Abstract

The literature is clear, today's K12teaching vacancies are more likely to occur in poverty schools and these schools require a stronger teacher skill set due to the complexity of student and community needs. Many teacher education program curriculum, coursework, and internships do not intentionally expose and engage students to the unique needs of poverty K12 students and communities. This study sought to determine if teacher preparation program students (n=86) placed in poverty schools during internships faced different challenges than program students placed in non-poverty schools during internships. Findings from school administrator evaluations of student teachers run counter to the literature. Recommendations, as a result of this study, are focused on the commitment to continuous program improvement and the requirements found in national accreditation standards to better prepare tomorrow's teachers.

Keywords*:* Poverty School, National Accreditation, Student Teacher, Teacher Attrition, Teacher Evaluation, Teacher Preparation Program

1.0 Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a remarkable amounted policy directed at teacher preparation and an intense debate about whether and how various approaches to preparing and supporting teachers make a difference (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).This is especially true when it comes to preparing teachers to fill vacancies in what states consider poverty schools. By definition, poverty schools are characterized as inner-city or rural schools that, as a consequence of their location in economically depressed or isolated districts, a majority of the students enrolled are eligible to receive free or reduced-priced meals at school. Such schools have high turnover rates and a high percentage of relatively new teachers because more experienced teachers, whose seniority gives them greater choice, tend to go elsewhere (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Rookie teachers in classrooms today are disproportionately concentrated in poverty schools, which are typically low-performing and serve large proportions of minority students (Woodworth et al., 2009). Research shows that these schools have difficulty attracting and retaining experienced teachers or well-prepared new teachers. Investigation by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2004) has shown that poverty schools rely heavily on lateral entry teachers or teachers with little experience. Consequently, the first teaching position many new teachers secure is in a setting that may be very different from the one they grew up in (The New Teacher Project, 2012). Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) suggested that in 2012, attrition of teachers was approximately 55% in high poverty schools and teacher turnover rates in these urban schools result in large numbers of teaching vacancies. While many preservice teachers possess the desire, passion, and disposition needed to serve all children and their families, not all have the skills necessary to address the particular needs of populations of children different from themselves in terms of socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural background (Puig & Recchia, 2012).A growing body of evidence indicates that attrition is unusually high for those who lack preparation for teaching in such environments (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014).Improving teacher quality in schools with poor, low-performing, and largely non-White students has become an imperative of education policy(Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014). This study focuses on teacher preparation program efforts to determine if student teachers placed in poverty schools during internships have different challenges than student teachers placed in non-poverty schools for internships and subsequently, identify areas that need improvement in the university's teacher preparation program. Simply put, is there a correlation between school placement diversity and the success of student teachers during internships and what teacher preparation program elements can be linked to the findings.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Teacher shortages are a function of both declines in candidates to teaching and high rates of teacher attrition, especially in poverty schools. This turnover is costly, and undermines student achievement and school improvement efforts (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Recent studies conducted in California, Texas, New York, and Georgia show that teachers systematically move away from schools with high concentrations of poor children of color(Carroll, Reichardt, Guarino,& Mejia, 2000) and this teacher attrition disproportionately impacts poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001).In 2013, almost one in10 teachers in high-poverty public schools left the profession. In contrast, less than one in 15 teachers in low-poverty schools left the profession (Goldring, Taie, & Riddlesm, 2014).

Today, just over half of all students attending public schools in the United States are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, according to a new analysis of federal data.In fact, a report released by the Southern Education Foundation, found that 51% of children in public schools qualified for free or reduced-price lunches in 2013, which means that most of them come from low-income families. By comparison, 38% of public school students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in 2000 (Southern Education Foundation, 2015).The data support that teachers are educating larger numbers of poverty children.

In an effort to stem teacher attrition and high turnover in poverty schools, the U.S. Department of Education requires each state to create a state equity plan to address differential access to high-quality teachers. The equity reports filed in 2015 reveal the same patterns across the nation, unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers disproportionately found in poverty schools (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).The evidence of stark inequities in access to effective teachers (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015) has motivated efforts to improve teacher effectiveness as a means of reducing educational and economic inequality (Adnot, Dee, Katz,& Wyckoff, 2017).

Poverty schools subsequently struggle to attract well-prepared teachers, at times hiring individuals who have not yet completed their preparation. Many studies have documented the disproportionate concentration of underprepared and inexperienced teachers in high poverty and mid-high poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).Districts pay a substantial cost to recruit, hire, and train a steady stream of new teachers, with the highest-poverty districts shouldering an even greater burden because they have the highest rates of teacher turnover (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). High-need schools must continually investin recruitment efforts, professional support, and training for new teachers without reaping the benefits of many of these investments (Shields et al., 2001). Policymakers and researchers recognize these issues and have sought policies and practices to provide all children with effective teachers (Adnot, Dee, Katz & Wyckoff, 2017).A gap exits in the literature of effective teacher preparation program practices to collect objective, third party data from the K-12 schoolhouse on the needs and challenges of student teachers placed in poverty K12 schools for internships.

3.0 Definition of Terms

Poverty Schools -Schools where 50.1% to 100% of the students are eligible for free or reduced priced lunches

National Accreditation - A process for assessing and enhancing academic and educational quality through voluntary peer review

Student Teacher- A student who is studying to be a teacher and participates in supervised teaching internship in an elementary or secondary school

Teacher Attrition-The rates at which teachers leave the profession or switch schools

Teacher Evaluation - A process for measuring and judging the quality of performance of a program, a process, or individuals

Teacher Preparation Program - The entity responsible for the preparation of educators including a nonprofit or for-profit institution of higher education

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Teacher Attrition in Poverty Schools

Numerous studies show that teacher turnover greatly varies according to the type of teacher, and that turnover is highest among beginners (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). More than 42% of new teachers leave teaching within 5 years of entry and, moreover, discovered a steady increase in beginning teacher attrition over the past 2 decades (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014).

Many studies of urban teacher retention have been embedded in large-scale examinations of factors associated with or predicting teacher retention across a variety of settings (urban, suburban, and rural). Most of these studies have focused on characteristics of school environments or teachers' personal characteristics that can be easily identified and quantified through survey and national databases (see Borman & Dowling, 2008 for review).The literature suggested that attrition appears higher in schools designated as poverty and low performing under accountability systems, which are very likely among those already struggling most to retain teachers. More than 50 years of literature documented the negative effects of poverty on students, including those that may limit the cognitive development of children (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2014). Historical patterns reveal a long-standing trend that has been a subject of many desegregation and school finance lawsuits: Students in high poverty, high-minority schools are most likely to be taught by underprepared, inexperienced, and out-of-field teachers. These schools often experience difficulty hiring and high turnover on a regular basis, and they are the most severely affected when teacher shortages become widespread (Shields et al. 2001). This happens, in part, because inequitable funding of schools leaves many low-wealth urban and rural communities with inadequate resources, so they must pay lower salaries and typically have poorer working conditions (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

4.2 Poverty School Challenges

The extent of challenges for early career teachers is generally greater in high poverty schools (Kardos& Johnson, 2010) and literature is replete with evidence of the importance of having a sufficient number of effective teachers, using sound instructional practices, and providing additional student support services. Unfortunately, many poverty schools—especially those that struggle—do not have these. The lack of these key practices further compounds the difficulty of negating the effects of poverty (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2014).Poverty schools tend to suffer from inadequate school resources that contribute to teacher retention. Another study noted that poverty schools tend to lose teachers when they are assigned large classes (Simon & Johnson, 2015).Some of the largest variation in teacher shortages is not between states, but between schools, both within and across districts. Regardless of the state, students in poverty and high minority schools typically feel the largest impact of teacher shortages.

The skills needed to teach in poverty schools are greater because teachers must be much more expert at diagnosing student learning, differentiating instruction to address achievement gaps, and supporting a range of social, emotional, health, and psychological needs, in addition to sometimes complex academic needs. This adds a layer of complexity to preparing teachers who can meaningfully connect with and teach children who may have very different childhood experiences from those of their teachers. For example, Virginia's urban high poverty schools face significant challenges. The state's highest poverty schools have lower student attendance rates and fewer students who are continuously enrolled for the full school year. Only two of the state's 120 highest poverty elementary schools scored above the state median on the English Standards of Learning end of year assessment. In many of these schools, the challenges of poverty are exacerbated by an insufficient number of effective teachers (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2014).

Educating historically underserved communities of students requires schools and districts to recruit talented teachers to educate and lead. Some traditionally high poverty schools have been successful at recruiting high-quality teachers by partnering with universities to create stronger pipelines, and leveraging personal and professional networks to develop a pool of high-quality candidates (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

4.4 Teacher Preparation Programs

The literature supports that quality university teacher preparation programs are a key factor in teacher quality and retention and brings to light the need to continually improve teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers. Having strong preparation for teaching increases teachers' efficacy, a key factor related to the likelihood that teachers will remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Growing evidence demonstrates that attrition is higher for those who enter the profession without adequate preparation. The quality and intensity of supervision, and the evaluation tools used to guide supervision, are factors that might be potentially important components of teacher learning and improvement. The match between placements in which candidates learn to teach and their eventual teaching assignments—in terms of the type of students, grade level, and subject matter—appear to be associated with stronger teaching in the early years (Koerner et al., 2002).

Similarly, preparation in how to work with diverse student populations appears tohave an effect on teacher effectiveness, in particular, training in multicultural education, teaching limited English proficient students, and teaching students with special needs (Wenglinsky, 2002).

However, there is a great deal of disagreement over the character, content, and caliber of the education, preparation, and credentials prospective candidates ought to obtain to be considered qualified to teach. (Ingersoll& Strong, 2011).There are many stakeholders when it comes to the question of what pre-service teachers need to learn and do in order to prepare for quality teaching (Darling-Hammond &Bransford, 2005).

5.0 Methodology

This study was designed for two purposes. First, use the findings to improve a teacher preparation program and second, to acquire valid and reliable data in support of national accreditation. The overall intent was to discover challenges student teachers faced in poverty schools as compared to performance in non-poverty schools as rated by school administrator evaluations. The researcher reviewed summative student teacher evaluations completed by school administrators at the end of the student teacher's internship period during the 2015-2017 academic years to identity challenges in teaching performance that could be linked to the university's teacher preparation program. Administrator evaluations are considered a third party source and the administrators are licensed by the state to evaluate pedagogy. Merriam (2002) stated, in judging the value of a data source, one can ask whether it contains information or insight relevant to the research questions and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner. If these two questions can be answered in the affirmative, there is no reason not to use a particular source of data (p.105).

5.1 Research Questions

The literature well established that teaching in poverty schools takes a greater range of teacher effectiveness skills than non-poverty schools. Because of the aforementioned research gap surrounding student teacher effectiveness in poverty schools, this study sought to determine if there is a significant difference between student teacher instructional evaluation scores in poverty K12 schools compared tonon-povertyK12 schools. The associated null hypotheses takes the general form of: there is no statistically significant (alpha = 0.05) difference between student teacher evaluation scores at poverty schools compared to student teacher evaluation scores at non-poverty schools.

5.2 Population and Procedures

The population was a convenient sample that consisted of teacher preparation program students enrolled in student teaching internships at a university in Southeast Virginia during the 2015-2017 academic years. The population studied was largely homogenous; almost 88% white female and traditional college aged. Studies on teachers' personal characteristics that are associated with or predict retention in all types of schools have focused on age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of teaching experience, marital and family status, ability (measured by standardized college entrance or teacher certification exams), qualifications (degree, certification status), and self-efficacy. Generally, these studies have shown high turnover, particularly in urban schools, of young, unmarried females with no dependents (Borman& Dowling, 2008; McKinney, Berry, Dickerson, & Campbell-Whately, 2007).

All of the student teachers were placed in public elementary, middle, or high schools serving two neighboring cities in Southeast Virginia, including the city where the university is located. A total of 86student teachers completed two 8-week student teaching internship during the period studied one placement in each school division. The University has no say in which schools student teachers are placed by the school division's Human Resource Departments. The placement of student teachers is solely up to the needs of the school division and availability of cooperating teachers. Student teachers were placed in a total of 39 separate schools, 13 of which were designated as poverty schools by The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2017) and 26 non-high poverty. It is noted that some elementary schools had more than one university student teacher serving during each 8-week placement. The researcher recognized that a level diversity exists among poverty schools. Figure 2 presents a graphic of the range of percent of poverty within school across the school divisions studied (VDOE, 2017). For the purposes of this research, all student teachers studied received summative evaluations from school administrators.
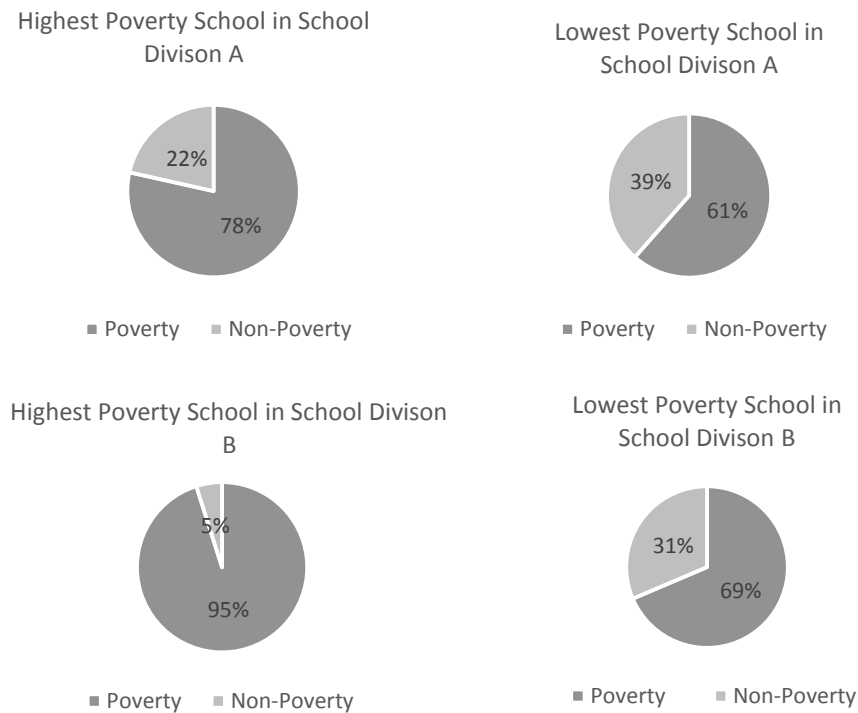
Figure 1. Variation by Percentage of the Level of Poverty Across Schools Served by Student Teachers During the 2015-2017 Academic Years

5.3 Instruments

The most widely used form of teacher evaluation has traditionally been classroom observations that measure evident classroom processes, including specific teacher practices, interactions between teachers and students, or other holistic aspects of instruction (Goe, Bell, & Little 2008). The researcher analyzed a quantitative instrument germane to 86student teachers from the same teacher preparation program: *School Administrator Evaluation.* The educator preparation program studied is heavily influenced by state and national accreditation standards. The elementary and secondary programs studied all follow strict content mandates set forth by the state of Virginia. Each program awards an initial license to teach in the area or discipline studied. Validity and reliability of the instrument used by the university were derived and supported by the Virginia Department of Education's *The Research Base for the Uniform Performance Standards for Teachers (2015)* which highlights key findings drawn from relevant empirical studies over the last 25 years. The evaluation instrument represented in this study contained the prescribed VDOE Teacher Performance Standards (Table 1). All instruments utilized VDOE's recommended unanchored Likert– typ escale (Unsatisfactory) to(Exemplary)} for all 6 Standards (Table 2). The exception being that the *School Administrator Evaluation* did not contain the seventh *VDOE Teacher Performance Standards:* Student Academic Progress. This was a strategic move on behalf of university program faculty as they had an understanding of the administrator's time constraints in applying Standard 7 with fidelity. Standard 7 demands an analysis of data for numerous K12 student artifacts, i.e. classroom assessments, tests.

The *Code of Virginia* requires (1) that teacher evaluations be consistent with the performance objectives (standards) set forth in the Board of Education's *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers.* Public school divisions in Virginia are mandated to provide training in the understanding and application of the all Teacher Performance Standards for school administrators and teachers. Thus, university faculty have full confidence that school administrators who evaluate university student teachers have a skill in applying the Teacher Performance Standards in the field. A sample of the school administrators evaluation questions are presented in Table 3 to provide context to the instrument used for data collection.

Table 1 *VDOE Teacher Performance Standards*

1. Professional Knowledge
2. Instructional Planning
3. Instructional Delivery
4. Assessment of and for Student Learning
5. Learning Environment
6. Professionalism
7. Student Academic Progress (*not present in the School Administrator Evaluation*)

Table 2 VDOE Performance Appraisal Rubric

Exemplary	*Proficient*	*Developing/Needs Improvement*	*Unacceptable*
In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher creates a dynamic learning environment that maximizes learning opportunities and minimizes disruptions within an environment in which students self-monitor behavior.	The teacher uses resources, routines, and procedures to provide a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment that is conducive to learning.	The teacher is inconsistent in using resources, routines, and procedures and in providing a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment.	The teacher inadequately addresses student behavior, displays a harmful attitude with students, and/or ignores safety standards.

*Proficient is the expected level of performance.

Table 3 Sample Administrator Evaluation Questions

Standard 1 - Professional Knowledge. The student teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.
Exemplary   (4)   Proficient (3)   Developing/Needs Improvement (2)   Unacceptable (1)
Standard 2 - Planning for Instruction. The student teacher plans using the Virginia Standards of Learning, theschool's curriculum, effective strategies, resources, and data to meet the needs of all students.
Exemplary   (4)   Proficient (3)   Developing/Needs Improvement (2)   Unacceptable (1)

5.4 Limitations

The researcher's interpretations and perceptions of teacher effectiveness and teacher evaluation have been shaped by his experiences as a school principal, he thus brings content and context knowledge as well as experience to the study. The researcher brings bias to the table as an advocate of public education, with an understanding that today's public school teachers have a dynamic, public, and often tenuous responsibility. With the nature of a convenience sample, threats to external validity in terms of population, settings, and time are present. The researcher cannot extrapolate to other university teacher preparation program student populations for the included time period; the researcher can only make conclusions for the limited dataset that was analyzed. In this first cut at exploration of the administrator evaluation, the researcher felt that it was reasonable to treat each of the six categories as a separate evaluation, and various control methods (Bonferroni, Holm's Sequential Bonferroni, etc.) were not applied.

6.0 Results

6.1 School Administrator Evaluations

Evaluations based on careful classroom observations can identify effective teachers and teaching practices (Kane et al., 2011).The results provide useful data for decision making by program faculty concerning accreditation standards, as well as, program improvement initiatives.

School administrators rated higher mean consistency scores for student teachers (*N*=29) teaching in poverty schools(*M* = 3.83; *SD* =.27). By comparison, school administrators rated student teachers teaching in non-poverty schools (*N*=57) with a lower mean consistency score (*M* = 3.77; *SD* = .18). Four of the six VDOE Performance Standards; Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Learning Environment, and Professionalism reported higher mean scores for student teachers teaching in poverty schools. Student teachers in non-poverty schools reported higher mean scores in Performance Standards of Instructional Delivery and Assessment of and for Student Learning as scored by school administrators as represented in Figure 2.
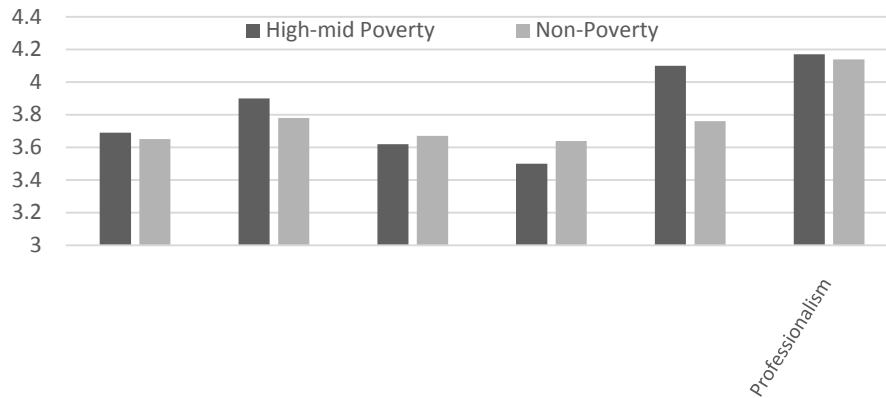
Figure 2.School Administrator Evaluation Scores of Student Teacher Performance in Poverty and Non-povertySchools

Table 4 summarizes the results for analyses using the independent samples *t*-test to determine whether a statistically significant difference exists among student teachers placed in poverty schools comapred tonon-povertyschools for each of the six VDOE Teacher Performance Standards taken from school administrator evalations selected for review. For the null hypotheses that there is no statistically significant difference between administrator evaluation scores between student teachers placed at poverty schools and those placed at non-povertyschools, all of the *t*-tests were not statistically significant with alpha set at .05, and there is no evidence to reject all six null hypotheses as indicated in Table 4. The effect size using Cohen's *d* is quite low for all six categories. By convention, values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 represent low, medium, and high ratings (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2013). Thus Instructional Planning (0.03) has a low effect size.In determining statistical conclusion validity, both statistical and practical significance provide some essential elements that require evaluation (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results for six Categories of the School Adminstraors Field Evaluation of Student Teacher Performance

	Poverty School			Non-povertySchool						
Category	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	95% CI for Mean Difference	Effect size	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Professional Knowledge	3.69	.93	29	3.63	.95	57	.37, .49	.03	.27	.79
2. Instructional Planning	3.90	.86	29	3.79	.94	57	.21, .31	.06	.51	.61
3. Instructional Delivery	3.62	1.01	29	3.68	.98	57	.51, .38	.03	.28	.78
4. Assessment of and for Student Learning	3.48	.95	29	3.65	.95	57	.60, .27	.09	.77	.45
5. Learning Environment	4.10	.77	29	3.80	.98	57	.08, .05	.17	1.58	.12
6. Professionalism	4.20	.89	29	4.10	.89	57	.39, .39	.06	0.07	.94

* p < .05

7.0 Findings

The findings from this study provide interesting insights that run counter to themes found in the literature. Despite the lack of statistical differences between the two groups of student teachers, the researcher finds this data valuable for teacher preparation program improvement and for national accreditation evidence. With alpha set at 0.05, all six reviewed VDOE Performance Standards from the Administrator Evaluation of student teachers teaching in poverty and non-poverty schools did not yield statistically significant results. These results are tempered by the low effect sizes as measured by Cohen's *d.* Administrator comments and supporting evidence that would provide support for each rating and additional insight in the scoring of the Performance Standards on the evaluations were largely absenter vague. In other words, almost all administrator evaluations of student teachers had positive evaluation comments, however few evaluations had recommendations for student teacher improvement purposes.

Studies of recent teacher education program graduates and novice teachers indicate that many often feel ill-prepared and reluctant to teach in poverty schools (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Watson, 2011).Of interest to the researcher was that lack of statistical evidence that student teachers were facing additional challenges as rated by the VDOE Teacher Performance Standards in poverty schools. The literature is awash with evidence that teachers in poverty schools face challenges that are often not found in non-poverty schools. Challenges that tie directly to the VDOE Professional Standards in addressing low student achievement, low student attendance, and the need for sound class routines and procedures to create a positive learning environment. All of which take additional teacher skillets, expertise, compassion, and ultimately experience to appropriately address every day in a classroom. The researcher knows all too well the struggles teachers have in poverty schools from his experience as a principal in a poverty school. The findings reveal prevailing themes that student teachers are meeting and exceeding all expected VDOE Teacher Performance Standards no matter the socioeconomic background of the students or community served. The findings allude to questions that require an examination of the university's teacher preparation program, the quality and effectiveness of the cooperating teachers that serve the university students, and the characteristics of the school administrators conducting the evaluations.

6.0 Recommendations for Program Improvement and Accreditation Practices

The University's Teacher Preparation Program underwent redevelopment three years earlier with an overhaul of course content, practicum and internships requirements, and greater stakeholder involvement and decision-making in all facets of the Teacher Education Program. Many institutions of higher education have tried to more intentionally design teacher preparation programs (course work, clinical experiences, and mentoring) in ways that encourage and more fully prepare candidates who are highly effective and committed to urban teaching (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Freedman &Appleman, 2009). However research noted the typical reform measures have generally focused more attention on the structure of teacher preparation programs — examining whether they are four or five years in length, graduate or undergraduate, and alternative or traditional certification pathways — than on the content of the programs (Hightower et al., 2011). Recommendations, as a result of this study, are focused on the commitment to continuous program improvement and the requirements found in national accreditation standards. A study by Levine (2006) suggested that as teacher preparation programs sought to gain respect in the world of higher education, the focus was on academic research instead of classroom practice and as a result, prospective teachers are not trained in the strategies needed to be effective in an environment where student achievement is paramount. Although the findings from the student teacher evaluations did not glean themes that translate to immediate concrete actions for program improvement, it did spur a review, reflection, and validation of program changes to improve the teacher preparation program and thus, better prepare tomorrow's teachers.

6.1 Changes to University Teacher Education Program

The lack of statistical differences between student teachers placed at poverty schools compared to those placed at non-poverty schools might be attributed to the purposive steps faculty took to improve the quality and effectiveness of program graduates in accordance with a national accreditation cycle and continuous improvement initiatives. The evidence used to support national accreditation requires university faculty to document processes used to appropriately and purposefully institute program improvements based on internal and external data from various program measures. This gathering and documentation of evidence supports program faculty in making a case that the university program meets standards for national accreditation.

6.2 Cooperating Teacher Quality

Glickman and Bey (1990) suggested that student teachers consider the cooperating teacher to be the most important factor in their entry to the profession. Cooperating teachers themselves also view their role in teacher education as the most important part of "learning to teach" (Roberts, 2000).Knowles & Cole, (1996) suggested that the current practices for ensuring that cooperating teachers are professionally prepared for their work are inadequate and fail to address some of the most basic issues associated with their supervisory work. Program faculty understood that student teachers tend to replicate the practices of their cooperating teachers, at times without reservation. Faculty met with partnering school divisions and developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the quality and licensing requirements of cooperating teachers to best meet the needs of university student teachers. Specific to the MOU, the parties came to the agreement that cooperating teachers must be recommended by their building principal, achieved tenure with evaluation scores no less than proficient and preferably at the exemplary level, and have demonstrated a willingness to mentor. It was agreed that the university faculty would provide feedback to partnering school divisions on how well cooperating teachers fulfilled their role. Only the names of cooperating teachers who were rated as highly recommended by student teachers were provided to school divisions at the end of each semester. The process had an intended consequence for the university of building a pool of highly recommended and highly qualified cooperating teachers, many of whom serve as cooperating teachers year after year.

6.3 Early Experiences with Diverse Communities

Efforts continue at the university to increase the diversity of its student population, particularly in teacher preparation programs. Boutte (2012) reported some improvement has been made toward having the demographics of persevere teachers reflect the demographics of the children with whom they work. The homogenous nature of the elementary education program student body coupled with program faculty experience inlocal job market swhere most vacancies resided in poverty schools, prompted faculty to expose program students to diverse communities early and often in the preparation program. Adams, Bondy, Kuhel, (2005) found that pre-service teachers who engaged in community service in conjunction with their course work and who already had done volunteer work with low-income children and families tended to respond to the experience with greater cultural responsiveness and dedication to children living in poverty than those who did not have such prior experiences. Program faculty initiated deeper partnerships with local poverty K6schools whose student body and community were different from that ofprogram students. Program faculty called on the principals of successful povertyK6 schools as guest speakers for the university's various courses and friendships between principals and faculty provided additional paths for student volunteer opportunities at their schools. Today, program students enter K6 classrooms early in their program in order to observe and experience purposeful teacher actions well before they are enrolled in student teaching. Program students complete two 45-hour practicum's, each over an 8-week period. Among the required experiences include: participation in subject collaborative planning meetings, participation in parent conferences, participation in child study meetings and special education meetings, attendance at department and faculty meetings, engagement in small student group remediation, and engagement in after school extracurricular activities and evening school functions. All of these activities are meant to extend familiarity with the needs of poverty students and communities before student teaching. Dee and Henkin (2002), and Dedeoglu and Lamme (2011) found that preservice teachers who scored highest on surveys on beliefs and attitudes toward diversity and multicultural issues tended to have had more prior cross-cultural experiences through friendships, employment, volunteer work, or living in multi-racial neighborhoods.

6.4 Addition of Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) to Program Curriculum

A curricular focus on school-wide Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) and at-risk students took place in 2015. The university's largest partnering school division recommended that all K6 schools implement PBIS in an effort to reduce the number of suspensions throughout the division, close the disproportionate gap that exists in the number of suspensions administered to African-American males compared to students in other demographic groups, and maximize instructional time for all students. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, PBIS builds on a school culture of shared decision-making and singular faculty expectation for student behavior and success. The program requires teachers to understand their students on many levels and this deeper student-teacher relationship fosters mutual respect. Faculty knew that program students would be immersed in PBIS during all field experiences and faculty reached out to partnering school division principals to begin discussions regarding the university's involvement in PBIS.

Faculty incorporated the PBIS curriculum resources with stakeholder input the classroom management and multicultural education curriculums. Faculty invited principals and licensed teachers to speak about PBIS and how the program is implemented in their schools. Today, local principals and teachers discuss and demonstrate PBIS and how the school uses school-wide data to build a culture of high expectations for student success. This process equipped our program students to better understand and appreciate diversity in today's public schools builds confidence for internship entry.

Recommendations for program improvement involve implementing similar changes to teacher preparation programs. National accreditation demands a culture of evidence by analyzing data to make program improvement decisions. This study's findings might not be applicable to all teacher preparation programs; however the outcomes of this study can be a guide for program improvement decision-making for other university teacher preparation programs.

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