Follow the Money or Follow the Mentors? The Impact of Mentoring on Absenteeism and Achievement in High Poverty Schools

Judy Jackson May, Ph.D.
Bowling Green State University

Diane M. Conway, M.S.
Bowling Green State University

Andrea D. Guice, Ed.D.
Professional Services, LLC

Abstract

Since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, over 300 billion dollars have been funneled to schools through Title I funds. Qualifying school districts receive Title I funds to address disparities between disadvantaged students' academic achievement and their less impoverished peers. Substantial research has focused on the impact of funding and other significant factors on student achievement. One such significant factor impacting student achievement is chronic absenteeism, which is associated with lower student performance. Students from disadvantaged environments are more likely to miss school than students from higher-income families. This causal-comparative examination investigates the effects of a mentoring program on disadvantaged students in an urban secondary school. The findings reveal that students participating in mentoring for extended periods demonstrate significantly fewer absences, resulting in higher grade point averages. These findings indicate that low-budget school mentoring programs have a positive impact on absenteeism and student achievement.

Keywords: absenteeism, achievement gaps, Title I, natural mentors, relationships, poverty, grade point averages, cogenerative dialogues

Introduction

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was enacted under the Johnson administration to address the growing disparity or "gap" in achievement between disadvantaged students and their higher-achieving peers. Biernat (2012) defines the achievement gap as "the observed disparity in student performance determined by numerous educational measures" (p. 55). While achievement gap data have historically focused on the differences between Black and white students, recent decades show that the divide between poor and affluent families has widened rapidly (Reardon, 2012; Tavernise, 2012). According to Reardon (2011), the academic disparity attributed to income is nearly double the gap between white and Black students. While typically associated with urban centers, significant pockets of poverty-stricken students reside in rural areas (Dupere et al., 2019). Based on national averages, rural students are nearly 50% more likely to live below the poverty line than their urban peers and are often overlooked by policymakers (Robson et al., 2019). Statistics show that students in urban and rural centers demonstrate similar risk factors leading to chronic absenteeism. These risk factors relate to extended exposure to hardships within the family and community associated most notably with persistently high poverty (Dupere et al., 2018; Dupere et al., 2019; Mykerezi et al., 2014). Rafa (2017) affirms that chronic absenteeism is higher among students with existing risk factors, such as living in poverty.

Nearly 30 years of research supports the positive effects of one-on-one mentoring and tutoring between at-risk students and community members (Bien, 1999; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006; Rogers, 2014; Volkmann & Bye, 2006; Wasik, 1998; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Increasingly, studies also report positive correlations between mentoring and improved attendance (Gutierrez, 2013; Mac Iver, Sheldon et al., 2017; Volkmann & Bye, 2006).

As the most extensive program under ESEA, Title I affords significant funding to schools with students from low-income families for additional programming to increase underachieving students' academic success (Leachman et al., 2016). Title I funding is based on the premise that money positively impacts student achievement. This premise draws attention to the protracted and controversial debate over what role money plays in student success. In 1966, James Coleman et al. published the Equality of Educational Opportunity, which studied the impact of money and other factors on student achievement. The Coleman Report notes that "It is known that socioeconomic factors bear a strong relation to academic

achievement. When these factors are statistically controlled, it appears that differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement" (p. 21-22). While the Report finds little support for the relationship between school factors and student achievement, Coleman did find that socioeconomic background is a strong predictor of student achievement, and the lowest-achieving students are most sensitive to school characteristics. Coleman's influential school characteristics include poor teacher quality, the degree to which a student feels control over their fate, school climates that encourage success, community attitudes toward (encouraging or discouraging) success, and community expectations for success.

The research exploring the impact of Title I programs on student achievement is mixed at best. Some studies show short term gains; some show modest gains at certain levels; others show no gains, and many studies fail to create apple to apple comparisons due to the variable and inconsistent nature of funding implementation (see, for instance, Borman & D'Agostino, 1996; Carter, 1984; Dynarski, 2017; Dynarski & Kainz, 2015; Matsudaira et al., 2006; Rubenstein et al., 2007; Van der Klaauw, 2008; and Weinstein, et al., 2009). Nearly 55 years after the Coleman Report and ESEA Title I funding initiation, the merits of adding money to address students' achievement in high-poverty environments have not been convincingly proven in the literature. This issue remains the catalyst for substantial debate and research.

This article describes the impact of a low-budget secondary school mentoring initiative in a Title I urban district in the midwestern United States. The mentoring initiative utilizes community members as "natural" mentors in a voluntary program targeting middle and high school students who score below grade level in both reading and math on annual assessments. We sought to answer two questions in this inquiry:

> Is there a difference in student absences based on the time of participation (middle school only, high school only, or both middle and high school) in a school mentoring program?
>
> And is there a difference in grade point averages of students based on the time of participation (middle school only, high school only, or both middle and high school) in a school mentoring program?

Background

Title I

ESEA was reauthorized in 2001 under the Bush administration as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and most recently reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) under President Obama. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), long-term trends show that low-income students consistently score below every other subgroup on standardized assessments with a mean difference of 26 points on a 0 to 100 point scale. Numerous factors place children academically at risk, such as inadequate health care, significant home care obligations, homelessness, high mobility rates, high parental unemployment, low parental education, and a lack of exposure to educational experiences (Garcia & Weiss, 2018; May, 2006). While these and other risk factors are significant, studies show that excessive school absences intensify existing threats and deepen achievement gaps (Rafa, 2017). The US Department of Education (2016) reports that many low-income parents lack reliable transportation, leading to high student absences. Moreover, substantial longitudinal research documents that absenteeism is negatively correlated with grade point averages and overall academic performance (Garcia & Weiss, 2018; Michelmore & Dynarski, 2017; National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2009; Ready, 2010).

The US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2016) defines chronic absenteeism as missing more than 15 days of school during one academic year. The Office further reports that nearly seven million students were chronically absent during the 2013-2014 school year. Rafa (2017) states that chronic absenteeism is higher among students with existing risk factors, including living in poverty. The impact of attendance on student achievement is so significant that absenteeism is an "indicator of school quality or student success in the accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act" (Rafa, 2017, p. 1). Under ESSA, states must define five student success indicators, one of which must be a "nontraditional" measure of school quality or student success (SQSS). A Georgetown University FutureEd report from 2018 cites that 36 states employ absenteeism as a "nontraditional" measure of SQSS in their ESSA plans.

Federally funded Title I programs targeting the achievement gap are administered through ESSA and currently provide more than 15 billion dollars annually to low-income schools (FutureEd, 2018). The United States Census Bureau determines eligibility for Title

I funds based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Over 90% of the school districts in the United States receive Title I funds and rely on these annual dollars to fund school initiatives (Igwebuike, 2018). These federal funds represent the most substantial resource for districts educating high-poverty students in densely populated cities and rural areas (Liu, 2008).

Dynarski and Kainz (2015) explain that targeted Title I expenditures for eligible low-income students include funds for free and reduced meals, remedial programs, tutoring, before- and after-school programs, summer programs, technology materials, supplemental services, and mentoring programs. However, in 1978 Congress added a provision indicating that if 40% or more of a school's student population is considered economically disadvantaged, the school may utilize targeted funds for the whole school's benefit. Over 50% of the nation's schools operate under the "schoolwide" model, not "targeted" student assistance. Glander (2015) reports that in 2013, of the nearly 70,000 Title I school buildings in the nation, 75% were designated as schoolwide. Dynarski and Kainz (2015) further explain that over 80% of Title I funds are spent on professional development, and that figure is as high as 93% in urban and high-poverty schools. In the 2013 school year, 25 million students under the schoolwide model shared 14 billion dollars in Title I funds, netting approximately $560 per student. Specifically, $558 in Title I funds were spent per student in low-socioeconomic schools, and shockingly $763 in Title I funds per student in higher socioeconomic schools. "Realistically, how much improvement can we expect by adding 5% to education spending?" (Dynarski & Kainz, p. 2). In 50 years and more than 300 billion dollars of funding in both targeted and schoolwide programs, Title I is shown to be largely unsuccessful in closing achievement gaps between the highest and lowest performing students (Borman et al., 1998; Dynarski & Kainz, 2015; Kirst, 1987; McDill & Natriello, 1998; Wong & Meyer, 1998).

Mentoring Programs and Student Achievement

Decades of research validate the critical role of supportive, caring relationships in the academic, social, and emotional development of students (Barnett et al., 1998; Baroody et al., 2014; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Studies reflect a significant association between mentoring and positive outcomes, most notably for students living in high-poverty environments (Park et al., 2016). Gordon et al. (2010) define mentoring as an affirming and supportive relationship between a youth and a non-parental adult. Students with more extended mentoring engagement demonstrate gains in self-confidence, efficacy, perceptions

of peer acceptance, and academic aptitude (Rhodes et al., 2006). Herrera et al. (2007) assert that students in mentoring relationships for at least one year with concerned, loving adults show significant improvements in their school behavior, cognitive insight, and school attendance.

Natural mentoring is emerging as a promising strategy involving more organic relationships that grow from family friendships, coaching, church, and neighborhood affiliations (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). In contrast to traditional mentors, natural mentors provide more emotional and practical support (Hiles et al., 2013). Natural relationships are described as caring interactions between students and non-parental individuals from the student's social network (Thompson et al., 2016). These perspectives align with Emdin's Reality Pedagogy (2016), emphasizing creating environments that engage an authentic understanding of students' cultural and contextual experiences. According to Emdin, this perspective suggests the need for "cogenerative dialogues," where educators identify with the students' culture, background, and lived experiences, making learning more relevant. Emdin (2011) describes reality pedagogy as an outgrowth of his research on urban schools that "focuses on the cultural understandings of the students within a particular social space" (p. 286). This examination seeks to expound on existing literature, noting mentoring as a successful strategy to foster positive relationships with students and increase achievement.

Method

This causal-comparative investigation compares the average number of absences and grade point average outcomes of three groups of students. The groups include students who participated in a school-based mentoring program during middle school only (grades 8–9), students who participated in high school only (grades 10–12), and students who participated in mentoring during both middle and high school (grades 8–12). To examine the effects of participation longevity, we drew data on absences, grade point averages, annual achievement assessments, and graduation rates for school years 2010 through 2015. Data were drawn from the district Data Analysis for Student Learning (DASL) and the state's Education Management Information System (EMIS). DASL is a comprehensive web-based student information and management system that provides seamless information exchange with the EMIS. The student data were generated on spreadsheets and were then coded for analysis and comparison with the mentor time and activity logs.

The convenience sample of 187 students was drawn from a midwestern United States urban district with an enrollment of 3,589 students. District demographics reflect 60% students of color (African American, Hispanic, and Multiracial), 99.9% economically disadvantaged, and a four-year graduation rate of 70%. The district embarked on a mentoring program at the middle and high school to close the achievement gap of disadvantaged students.

Students who scored below grade level in reading and math on 7th grade achievement tests during the 2009-2010 school year were invited to participate in the mentoring program upon entering 8th grade. Invitations were also extended to students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 who scored below grade level in reading and math in the previous year's assessment. Nearly 60% of the sample participated in mentoring during middle and high school, 33% participated during middle school only, and 7% participated during high school only. Participation for all students was voluntary, and while students were encouraged to stay in the program, they were free to withdraw at any time. Only students who participated for at least one year were included in the data collection. The participant demographics are depicted in Table 1. Among the participants, males had slightly higher participation than females, and more than 80% of the total sample was African American and multiracial.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristic of Participants (N=187)

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Female	85	45
Male	102	55
Participation Year		
Middle School Only	62	33
High School Only	14	7
Middle and High School	111	59
Race		
African American	138	74
Caucasian	30	16
Multiracial	19	10

Study Mentors

Four linkage coordinator mentors were hired following a meeting with the district Director of Academic Initiatives. The mentors were current school volunteers with connections to the school or community. Of the mentors, three were male, one was female, and all were Black. All the mentors were district alumni, but none possessed post-secondary degrees. The mentors received no formal training beyond a half-day of instruction with central office personnel.

Their primary responsibility was to "provide students with behavioral and emotional support" through individual and small-group tutoring. Mentors enjoyed latitude, flexibility, and autonomy to engage in practices to assist students during their school day. They met with students for a maximum of 5 days per week and a minimum of 2 days per week during specified periods. The mentors provided assistance overcoming academic obstacles, both in the classroom and at home, and provided behavioral and emotional support to address individualized student challenges. The mentors participated in many activities such as monitoring homework, creating and supervising student success plans, attempting to mend student-teacher relationships, providing alternatives to suspension and other infractions, and making home visits. When the mentors were not facilitating student sessions, they assisted with other school responsibilities such as cafeteria duty and student arrival and dismissal.

As part of a federal program, mentors maintained detailed logs of student attendance and activities. Data on the mentors' activities were gathered through multiple sources, including student activity logs, mentor planning logs, notes from monthly meetings, semi-annual interview notes with central office staff, parental interview notes, and discussions with the mentors themselves.

Data Sources and Variables

The study's dependent variables included absence data and grade point averages drawn from the district's DASL system and the statewide EMIS system. Grade point averages (GPA) on a 4-point scale were analyzed for years 2012-2014. The average number of absences was examined by the periods of participation for the three groups (middle school only, high school only, or middle and high school). Descriptive summaries for the dependent variables are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2
Summary of Quantitative Dependent Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grade Point Average 2012	186	1.93	0.90
Grade Point Average 2013	186	1.70	0.92
Grade Point Average 2014	156	1.75	0.91

Table 3
Average Number of Absences 2012 - 2015

	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Middle School Only	49	14.24	12.50	8.44
High School Only	27	13.75	12.33	9.14
Middle & High School	111	12.41	9.00	11.14
Total	187	13.08	10.75	10.21

The independent variable for the study included the time of participation. As shown in Table 4, the years of participation reflected whether students participated in mentoring during middle school only (grades 8 and 9), during high school only (grades 10, 11, and 12), or during both middle school and high school (grades 8–12).

Table 4
Summary of Quantitative Independent Variable

Mentoring Participation	N	%
Middle School Only	62	33
High School Only	14	8
Both Middle and High School	111	59
Total	187	100

Study Limitations

As a causal-comparative study, threats to internal validity include the nonrandomization of the sample and the inability to manipulate the independent variable (time of mentoring participation). Student participation was voluntary, providing for

relatively homogenous groups. Additional threats may include history, maturation, instrumentation, and unknown confounding variables.

Data Analysis and Results

Due to the extremely high absences of two students, a nonparametric test was utilized to determine if there were differences in the median number of absences based on the length of time students participated in the mentoring program. The Kruskal-Wallis Test was employed for its lack of sensitivity to outliers. Significant differences were found in the median number of absences among the three participation groups (middle school only, high school only, and both middle and high school) for the years 2012-2014 at the 10% significance level ($X^2_{(2)} = 6.078$, $p = .048$). However, deeper analysis was required to identify the specific group differences.

Multiple two-way comparisons between each pair of groups (MS vs. HS, MS vs. Both, HS vs. Both) using the Mann-Whitney Test determined that students enrolled in the mentoring program in both middle school and high school showed a statistically significant lower median number of absences than students enrolled in the program during middle school only ($z = -2.298$, $p = .022$). The adjusted significance level for the Mann-Whitney tests is equal to 0.033 (.10/3). The results are illustrated in Table 5 and 5.1

Table 5

Man-Whitney Test Comparison of Mentoring Participation and Absences

Participation	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Middle School Only	49	92.57	4536.0
Middle School and High School	111	74.40	8184.0
Total	159		

Table 5.1

Man-Whitney Test Statistics

Test Statistics	sra
Mann-Whitney U	2079.00
Wilcox W	8184.00
Z	-2.298
Asymp. Sig 2-tailed p-value	.022

A two-tailed Pearson Correlation was further utilized to evaluate the relationship between the average number of absences and the average grade point average between school years 2012–2013, 2013–2014, and 2014–2015. As shown in Table 6, at the 10% significance level, there was a significant negative correlation between the two variables [r=-.528, p=.000]. This finding illustrates that as the average number of absences decreased, the average GPA increased.

Table 6

Pearson Correlation of the average number of absences and grade point averages

		Average GPA
Average Attendance 2012-2015	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.528 .000 187
Average Attendance 2012 - 2015	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.521 .000 186

Discussion

Three meaningful findings emerged from this study. First, students who participated in the mentoring program during both middle school and high school demonstrated significantly fewer absences than those who participated in middle school only. Second, as the average number of absences decreased, the average GPA tended to increase. Third, and perhaps most valuable for practice, the findings show that positively impacting the academic achievement of at-risk students can occur at a low financial cost to districts. Overall, the data suggests an opportunity for educators to maximize a critical nexus between student absenteeism, mentoring, and achievement for at-risk students.

The literature is clear, absenteeism is a powerful predictor of student success (Erb-Downward & Watt, 2018; Kearney 2003; Rafa, 2017), and studies show mentoring relationships are a mitigating factor on student absences (Rogers, 2014; Weinberger & Forbush, 2018). Reducing student absenteeism is an often overlooked and yet achievable goal for schools (Nauer, 2016). Nearly two decades of research show that students who participate in mentoring programs for at least one year demonstrate significant gains in

academic growth, school behavior, self-confidence, extended interest in hobbies, and most importantly attendance (Allen & Eby, 2003; DuBois & Neville, 1997; Herrera et al., 2007; Park et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2016). Literature reflecting gains in attendance resulting from mentoring is significant because of what Kearney (2003) shows as a compelling relationship between chronic absenteeism and dropping out leading to failure.

The four-year experience for the 111 middle- and high-school students in the current study reveals that mentoring longevity matters with underachieving students. Additionally, the current study supports authors such as Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Park et al. (2016), who note mentoring program longevity is a facilitating variable for students' positive academic outcomes. The results suggesting an association between mentoring and achievement should advance critical conversations for instructional development for students at risk, including special populations and those served under Title I programs. The fact that chronic absenteeism is significantly higher among students living in poverty (Rafa, 2017) and with other risk factors should be a key consideration in program development. If school-based mentoring positively impacts absenteeism, schools gain a relatively simple but powerful research-based tool that may impact academic gains.

Moreover, this type of mentoring program becomes more impactful and increasingly feasible considering the mentor characteristics and qualifications. Aside from being graduates of the district and living in the community, the study mentors did not possess academic or instructional training to work with students in an official capacity. However, the program's strength may be the move from the traditional model of mentoring to an innate experience more likely to provide needed forms of student support.

By definition, natural mentors are organically grown and reflect relationships built on existing community connections and common bonds. Emdin's (2016) theoretical perspectives in *Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* may inform this unique mentoring phenomenon. The sharing of culture and ethnicity may promote what Emdin refers to as "cypher." Cypher reflects linking the student's external environment to the school environment, essentially overlapping dialogues between the student's life and the classroom. The natural mentoring process may approximate what Emdin refers to as "cogenerative dialogues," where culturally relevant interactions serve to inform the teaching and learning process. By engaging in activities such as making home visits, contacting and meeting with parents, attending sports and out-of-school events, and being aware of and participating in community events, the mentors are more likely to promote warm and safe climates.

Extensive research suggests that encouraging, positive, caring climates lay the foundation for student academic and social growth.

The positive correlation between attendance and grade point average in the current study offers empirical evidence that factors increasing attendance matter. The negative impact of high absenteeism on student success is well documented, and students who receive additional services beyond the classroom demonstrate better attendance (Garia & Weiss, 2018). Additional and enhanced services are hallmarks of targeted and schoolwide Title I programs costing millions of dollars annually. However, Title I initiatives, both targeted and schoolwide, show negligible returns for closing achievement gaps for disadvantaged students (Dynarski & Kainz 2015). The current study validates that focusing on a targeted intervention that is inexpensive, readily available, and environmentally adaptable is a proven course of action. Such targeted approaches support the research of Dynarski and Kainz, who note that "Focusing effective interventions on the neediest students may provide a way forward that is consistent with fiscal realities" (p. 1).

Typically, generalizing the results from causal-comparative studies to other school settings is cautioned because the sample groups are not randomly assigned. However, Cohen's effect size (d=.38) or the strength of group differences in the current study is not inconsequential. Glass et al. (as cited in Coe et al., 2017), contend that "the practical importance of an effect depends entirely on its relative costs and benefits. In education, if it could be shown that making a small and inexpensive change would raise academic achievement by an effect size even as little as 0.1, then this could be a very significant improvement" (p. 343).

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

For over 50 years, states have utilized federal Title I funds to attempt to assuage the achievement gap. Initially funds targeted inequities between Black and white children, but recent attention focuses on the widening disparity between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. Nevertheless, data show that millions of dollars in Title I programs have been largely unsuccessful in closing gaps in achievement. These enduring achievement gaps draw critical attention to the ongoing but unresolved debate on money's role in student success. The current study reveals that students in a high-poverty district participating in a low-cost mentoring program in middle and high school show

significantly fewer absences. Further, as the students' absences decreased, their grade point averages increased.

The Every Student Succeeds Act includes absenteeism as a critical, albeit non-traditional, indicator of student success. And this study indicates mentoring is a practical, sustainable, research-based intervention for reducing absenteeism in high poverty schools. While the programs' natural mentors bring no specialized or professional training, they do bring communal bonds, shared culture, and a commitment to student success. As community members, the mentors hold existing relationships with multiple external publics. Not only can mentoring programs impact student achievement, but they may also influence school policy, finance, and politics. Relative to other Title I programs such as before- and after-school tutoring, summer school programs, and other supplemental services, the mentoring program's cost is nominal. Natural mentors bring links that increase school leaders' opportunities to build relationships with parents, civic leaders, and other constituencies.

This examination suggests that money alone may not be the driver for student success. Success may relate to factors less guided by money, such as the importance of personnel who illustrate the genuine care, commitment, and fidelity necessary to build and maintain relationships leading to success. The implications for policy development include an authentic assessment of how high poverty schools create environments where students are encouraged and desire to attend. Creating inviting spaces where students choose not to be absent may be more challenging than funneling money into programs that lack measurable success. The creation of welcoming spaces may require deeper investments in personnel who care to create cultural connections and are genuinely invested in the expectations needed for high achievement. Following the mentors may be more significant than following the money.

References

Allen, T. D. & Eby, L. T. (2003). Relationship effectiveness for mentors: Factors associated with learning and quality. *Journal of Management,* 29, 469–486.

Barnett, D., Kidwell, S. L., & Leung, K. H. (1998). Parenting and preschooler attachment among low-income urban African American families. *Child Development, 69*: 1657–71.

Baroody, A. E., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Larsen, R. A., & Curby, T. W. (2014). The link between responsive classroom training and student-teacher relationship quality in the fifth grade: A study of fidelity of implementation. *School Psychology Review, 43*(1), 69–85.

Bien, A. M. (1999). School social worker involvement in mentoring programs. Children and Schools, 21(2), 120 – 128. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/21.2.120

Biernat, L. (2012). Reducing the achievement gap: There is only one real solution. *Widener Journal of Law, Economics & Race, 3,* 55–102.

Borman, G., D'Agostino, J., Wong, K., & Hedges, L. (1998). The longitudinal achievement of Chapter I students: Preliminary evidence from the prospects study. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 3*(4), 363-399.

Borman, G., & D'Agostino, J. V. (1996). Title I and student achievement: A meta-analysis of federal evaluation results. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 18*(4), 309-326.

Carter, L. (1984). The sustaining effects study of compensatory and elementary education. *Educational Researcher, 13*(7), 1984, 4-13.

Coe, R., Waring, M., Hedges, L. V. & Arthur, J. (2017) *Research methods and methodologies in education*. Sage.

Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Mood, A. M., Weinfeld, F. D., & York, R. L. (1966). Equality of educational opportunity. *US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Office of Education.*

Dynarski, M. (2017, March 2). It's not nothing: The role of money in improving education. *Brookings.* https://www.brookings.edu/research/its-not-nothing-the-role-of-money-in-improving-education/

Dynarski, M. & Kainz, K. (2015, November). Why federal spending on disadvantaged students (Title I) doesn't work. *Center on Children & Families at Brookings: Evidence Speaks Reports, 1*(8). https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-federal-spending-on-disadvantaged-students-title-i-doesnt-work/

DuBois, D. L., & Neville, H. A. (1997). Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology, 25*, 227–234.

Emdin, C. (2011). Moving beyond the boat without a paddle: Reality pedagogy, Black youth, and urban science education. *Journal of Negro Education, 80*(3), 284–295.

Emdin, C. (2016). For White folk who teach in the hood and the rest of y'all too: Reality, pedagogy, and urban education. Beacon Press.

Erb-Downward, J., Watt, P., & University of Michigan, P. S. (2018). Missing school, missing a home: The link between chronic absenteeism, economic instability and homelessness in Michigan. *Poverty Solutions, University of Michigan*.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*, 148–62.

FutureEd (2018, September 11). ESSA funds can be used to reduce chronic absence. *Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy*. https://www.attendanceworks.org/essa-funds-can-be-used-to-reduce-chronic-absence/

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2018, September 25). Student absenteeism: Who misses school and how missing school matters for performance. *Economic Policy Institute,* Washington, DC. https://www.epi.org/publication/student-absenteeism-who-misses-school-and-how-missing-school-matters-for-performance/

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2015, June 17). Early education gaps by social class and race start US children out on unequal footing: A summary of the major findings in inequity at the starting gate. *Economic Policy Institute.* www.epi.org/publication/early-education-gaps-by-social-class-and-race-start-u-s-children-out-on-unequal-footing-a-summary-of-the-major-findings-in-inequalities-at-the-starting-gate/

Glander, M. (2015). Selected statistics from the public elementary and secondary education universe: School year 2013-14. *National Center for Education Statistics.*

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 13*, 21–43.

Gordon, D., Iwamoto, D., Ward, N., Potts, R., & Boyd, E. (2010). Mentoring urban black middle school male students: Implications for academic achievement. *National Institute of Health, 78*(3), 277–289.

Grossman, J. B., & Rhodes, J. E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring program. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*, 199 – 219.

Gutierrez, S. (2013). The impact of school-based mentoring on student achievement and school engagement in elementary aged at-risk students: Implications for leadership. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, *73,* 10(A).

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development, 72*(2), 625–638.

Herrera, C., Grossman, J. B., Kauh, T. J., Feldman, A. F. & McMaken, J. (2007). *Making a difference in schools: The big brothers big sisters school-based mentoring impact study.* Public/Private Ventures

Hiles, D., Moss, D., Wright, J., & Dallos, R. (2013). Young people's experience of social support during the process of leaving care: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*, 2059-2071.

Igwebuike, A. C. (2018). Evaluating the effect of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's (ESEA) funds consolidation provision on school-level achievement at Title in elementary schoolwide program buildings. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation) Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

Kearney, C. A. (2003). Bridging the gap among professionals who address youths with school absenteeism: Overview and suggestions for consensus. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 34*(1), 57–65. https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.34.1.57

Kirst, M. W. (1987). *The federal role and Chapter 1: Rethinking some basic assumptions.* https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED298205

Leachman, M., Albares, N., Masterson, K., & Wallace, M. (2016). Most states have cut school funding, and some continue cutting. *Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.* Washington, DC.

Liu, G. (2008). Improving Title I funding equity across states, districts, and schools. *Iowa Law Review, 93*(3), 973.

Mac Iver, M. A., Sheldon, S., Naeger, S., & Clark, E. (2017). Mentoring students back on-track to graduation: Program results from five communities. *Education and Urban Society*, *49*(7), 643–675. https://doi.org/10.117/0013124516645164

Matsudaira, J. D., Hosek, A. & Walsh, E. (2006, March 24). *An Integrated Assessment of the Effects of Title I on School Behavior, Resources, and Student Achievement.* [Conference presentation]. American Education Finance Association Conference, Denver, Colorado.

May, J. J. (2006) The role of money, race, and politics in the accountability challenge. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research, 2*, 39-47.

McDill, E., & Natriello, G. (1998). The effectiveness of the Title I compensatory education program: 1965-1997. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk. 3*(4), 317-336.

Michelmore, K., & Dynarski, S. (2017). The gap within the gap: Using longitudinal data to understand income differences in student achievement. *AERA Open, 3*(1), 1-18.

Murray, C., & Greenberg, M. T. (2000). Children's relationship with teachers and bonds with school: An investigation of patterns and correlates in middle childhood. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(5), 423–445.

Murray, C., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Implementing a teacher–student relationship program in a high-poverty urban school: Effects on social, emotional, and academic adjustment and lessons learned*. Journal of School Psychology, 43*(2), 137–152.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2015). *The condition of education 2015.* http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015144.pdf

National Forum on Education Statistics. (2009). Every school day counts: The forum guide to collecting and using attendance data (NFES, 2009–804). *US Department of Education.* National Center for Education Statistics.

Nauer, K. (2016). Battling chronic absenteeism. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *98*(2), 28–34 https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716671903

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2010). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 2010 annual report.* Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.

Park, H., Yoon, J., Crosby, S. D. (2016). A pilot study of big brothers and big sister programs and youth development: An application of critical race theory. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61*, 83–89. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.12.010

Rafa, A. (2017, June). Chronic absenteeism: A key indicator of student success. Policy Analysis. *Education Commission of the States.*

Ready, D. (2010). Socioeconomic disadvantage, school attendance, and early cognitive development: The differential effects of school exposure. *Sociology of Education, 83*(4), 271–286.

Reardon, S. F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In G. J Duncan & R. J. Murname (Eds.), *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 91–116). Russell Sage.

Reardon, S. F. (2012, February 12). *Informing and advancing effective policy.* https://cepa.stanford.edu/news/education-gap-grows-between-rich-and-poor-studies-say

Rhodes, J. E. & DuBois, D. L. (2006). *Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement.* https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/j.2379-3988.2006.tb00048.x

Rhodes, J., Spencer, R., Keller, T. E., Liang, B., & Noam, G. (2006). A model for the influence of mentoring relationships on youth development. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*(6), 691–701.

Rogers, L. T. (2014). Absenteeism and truancy issues: Are mentoring programs funded by the office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention the answer? *Children & Schools*, *36*(3), 185–188. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdu013

Rubenstein, R., Schwartz, A. E., Stiefel, L., & Amor, H.B. (2007). From districts to schools: The distribution of resources across schools in big city school districts. *Economics of Education Review, 26*, 532-545.

Tavernise, S. (2012, February 9). Education gap grows between rich and poor, studies say. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/education/education-gap-grows-between-rich-and-poor-studies-show.html

Thompson, A. E., Greeson, J. K. P., Brunsink, A. M. (2016). Natural mentoring among older youth in and aging our of foster care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61,* 40–50. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.12.006

Thompson, L. A. & Kelly-Vance, L. (2001). The impact of mentoring on academic achievement of at-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 23*(3), 227-242.

US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2016). 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2013-14.html

US Department of Education (2016). Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools: An unprecedented look at a hidden educational crisis (online fact sheet). https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html

Van der Klaauw, W. (2008). Breaking the link between poverty and low student achievement: An evaluation of Title I. *Journal of Econometrics. 142*(2): 271-309

Volkmann, B., & Bye, L. (2006). Improved school attendance through adult volunteer reading partners. *Children & Schools*, *28*(3), 145–152.

Wasik, B. A. (1998). Volunteer tutoring programs in reading: A review. *Reading Research Quarterly, 33*(3), 264-362.

Wasik, B.A. & Slavin, R. E. (1998). Preventing early reading failure with one-on-one tutoring: A review of five programs. Reading Research Quarterly, 28(2), 179 – 200. https://doi.org/10.2307/747888

Weinberger, S. G., & Forbush, J. B. (2018). Backtalk: The role of mentors in reducing chronic absenteeism. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *99*(6), 80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718762432

Weinstein, M. G., Stiefel, L., Schwartz, A.E., & Chalico, L. (2009, August*). Does Title I increase spending and improve performance? Evidence from New York City*. Working Paper #09-09. NYU Steinhart School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp/featured/7?mobile_optout=1

Wong, K., & Meyer, S. (1998). Title I schoolwide programs: A synthesis of findings from recent evaluation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 20*(2), 115-36.

Dr. Judy Jackson May (she/her) *is an Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Leadership Studies in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. She currently teaches in and serves as coordinator for the Leadership Studies Doctoral Program. Dr. May also teaches in the Master of Educational Leadership Program as well serving as coordinator for an undergraduate teacher preparation course for which she wrote a textbook, Teacher talk: A 21st century guide for beginning educators. Prior to moving to higher education, she served as a speech pathologist/audiologist, multiple handicap teacher, school principal in urban and rural districts, and curriculum coordinator. Dr. May has delivered over 50 paper presentations and workshops at the regional, national, and international level including Honk Kong, Tokyo, Cambodia and South Africa. She has authored and/or co-authored 20 journal articles and book chapters and is currently co-editing a book, Case studies for leadership and adult development: Applying theoretical perspectives to real world challenges for Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. Dr. May also serves as the Northwest Region Manager for the Ohio School Boards Association.* ORCID: 0000-0002-4145-7475

Diane Conway (she/her) *is an Instructor of Statistics in the College of Business at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. She received her master's degree in Applied Statistics from Bowling Green State University and currently teaches a statistics course in the Master of Business Administration Program at BGSU. She is also finishing up her Ed.D. in Leadership Studies at BGSU. Most recently, she is the Subject Matter Expert in Statistics for ALEKS (a web-based, artificially intelligent, educational software). Ms. Conway also consults with PhD. candidates, nation-wide, in statistical analyses used for research.* ORCID: 0000-0001-5820-4207

Andrea D. Guice (she/her) *received her EdD from Bowling Green State University. She is a consultant, facilitator, grant writer, and grants manager for Dr. Andrea D. Guice Professional Services, LLC. Dr. Guice manages State and Federal grants and provides additional business and educational services for multiple agencies. She serves as an AmeriCorps VISTA for The Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in collaboration with the Obama Foundation's My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Alliance. Through this assignment, she serves the Lima, Ohio MBK community by facilitating pre-service mentor trainings, creating, and implementing a positive racial identity program for boys and young men of color, and securing local funding. She also serves as the project director for the Children's Defense Funds Freedom Schools® Summer Program in Lima, Ohio and worked with a group of diverse individuals to establish the Center for Peace and Reconciliation, serving as the corporation's first president. While remaining committed to her passions for education, leadership development, organizational change, social justice, cultural competency, and school reform, Dr. Guice is a qualified administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory and the Intercultural Conflict Inventory, utilizing these tools for individuals and institutions as pre- and post-assessments to evaluate development and training outcomes.* ORCID: 0000000320196277