Middle Grades Student Achievement and Poverty Levels: Implications for Teacher Preparation

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MIDDLE GRADES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND POVERTY LEVELS: IMPlications FOR TEACHER PREPARATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a history of the standardized testing and accountability movement, the curriculum standards attached to the accountability movement, and the attempted shift to common core. Student poverty and its impact on student achievement is the focus of this paper. Recognizing the impact of poverty on student achievement as measured by standardized tests the authors question the explicit practices of teacher preparation programs in preparing teacher candidates to work with students of poverty.

INTRODUCTION

In a time of increased accountability measures and volatility of educational policy, public and legislative bodies have become increasingly focused on student achievement as reported in statewide standardized test scores. Having all students take the same standardized test is like saying that we have “standardized” children and that we all expect them to learn in the same ways and exhibit this learning in the same way—through these standardized assessments. What these “one-size-fits-all” assessments fail to take into consideration, however, are the varied backgrounds of our students. Many factors play an important part in a student’s academic success, like special needs or environmental factors; this study focused on students’ socioeconomic status and how this affects student achievement. This paper discusses the implications of this research on current and future teacher preparation programs in higher education at the undergraduate level.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Popularity in standardized testing has risen dramatically after the publication of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform by the Reagan administration in 1983; this report portrayed the American educational system as a failing entity and proposed that its only way to redemption was through stricter accountability measures (i.e., increased standardized testing) (“Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?,” n.d.). The use of standardized testing has become controversial as these tests have become “high-stakes” for students and school faculty and administrators. Why do legislators and the general public care about standardized test scores? Numbers are the easiest data to analyze, and “educational attainment is well recognized as a powerful predictor of experiences in later life,” policymakers and the public assume that standardized testing data provide accurate reflections of student achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997, p. 61). However, as the push for increased accountability through standardized assessment gained momentum it left many students falling through the cracks; standardized tests do not take the varying experiences of our students into consideration when it comes to test results, and as a result, achievement gaps became the norm for many subgroups but most noticeably for our economically disadvantaged children. Additionally, the recent downturn in our nation’s economy has resulted in a greater income gap between our schools’ wealthy and disadvantaged children: “...the Great Recession wreaked havoc among working-class families’ employment. This has led to greater residential segregation and homogenously poor neighborhoods, leading to a higher concentration of poor students in certain schools” (Neuman, 2013, p. 18). The time frame that our nation experienced the Great Recession coincided with No Child Left Behind’s deadline of having all children test as proficient in math and reading (according to standardized tests) by 2014; our nation did not meet this benchmark.
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Concerns regarding standardized testing include placing too much emphasis upon scores, student testing anxiety, "teaching to the test," creating cheating concerns, and socioeconomic and cultural bias (Brown & Hattie, 2012; Olson, 1999). Part of the concern regarding standardized testing comes from concern that there is too much emphasis placed upon them, leading to concerns about student testing anxiety, "teaching to the test," skewed test results, and possible cheating concerns (Olson, 1999; Brown & Hattie, 2012, p. 289). Because these tests are considered "high-stakes," poor student performance can lead to negative consequences for students and teachers alike; to protect both the test-takers and test administrators, "good educational and psychological safety to make effective use of assessment, so too do teachers and school leaders need protection from negative consequences" (Brown & Hattie, 2012, p. 289). Some argue that the more important these tests become "in terms of the basis for promoting or retaining students, for funding or closing down schools—the more that anxiety is likely to rise," because localities "can be competitive" and that it ultimately "drives good teachers and principals out of the profession" (Kohn, 2000, p. 3; Rennulli, 2013, p. 1). Because the stakes of these tests are so high, test anxiety is now a common aliment amongst students across the nation; the Stanford-9 standardized exam, for example, even comes with instructions as to what actions the test administrator must take if a student vomits on a test booklet. This adds to the public sentiment that these tests are inflicting serious harm to children, both academically and emotionally, and these assessments do not result in improved cognition (Horn, 2003; Popham, 2001). Furthermore, despite the avalanche of funds allocated to standardized testing, there exists a great deal of evidence that standardized tests do not improve student performance. In fact, according to NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress), American children are actually performing worse after the implementation of No Child Left Behind academic countability measures ("Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?", n.d.). Perhaps most important is not what is being assessed but rather what is not being assessed, as what we measure is both invalid and misleading because student achievement depends on multiple factors that cannot be readily assessed, like ability, behavior, and socioeconomic status (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Wiggins, 2012). Because these examinations are designed to assess what is easily measured, they are inherently incapable of assessing what cannot be measured. These tests cannot ascertain "initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes" (Kohn, 2000, para. 45). This supports one of Albert Einstein’s most famous assertions: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

With regards to this study, socioeconomic status is viewed as a lens through which one measures achievement. Correlational studies show a strong relationship between high poverty and poor academic performance (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982; White et al., 1993). This correlation begins at the beginning of a child’s academic career, and even before, in some cases. Pavloski stated that poverty is more influential to academic performance than even gestational exposure to cocaine (2014). In every state in the nation the economically disadvantaged subgroup never outperforms other non-labeled students regardless of the grade level or subject area, supporting that the variable with the strongest correlation to achievement is socioeconomic status; correlations between SES and student achievement frequently range from .100 to .800 (Tenken, 2010; White, 2012). In a meta-analysis of research regarding SES status and achievement, Wigno found that the correlation between these two variables increased throughout the levels of schooling, climaxing in the middle school, and plateauing at the high school level (2005). This is likely because additional study on student achievement and SES at the middle level is crucial as "the [cognitive] effects of wealth are more indirect and must accrue over time" (Willingham, 2012, p. 34). Accountability measures were put into place to ensure a decline in achievement gaps between low income and higher income students; No Child Left Behind legislated a goal of 100 percent of students, regardless of identity, to score at proficient levels by 2014. However, the 2008 study forecast “nearly 100% failure” of California schools to meet these accountability measures; the study cited that the reason for this projected failure would be due to the poor results from limited English proficiency students and high poverty students (“Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?”, n.d.). Unfortunately, NAEP data also supports this prediction; the National Association for Educational Progress reported in 2005 that nearly 50% of all immigrant, minority, and low-income children were not proficient in high school and that in the nation’s largest cities, more than 30% of the lowest-income students land in the lowest percentile rankings on standardized assessments in reading and mathematics (Renzulli, 2013). Even the founder of the Educational Testing Service, Henry Chauncey, has been quoted as saying “if there is anything in heredity (such as tall parents having tall children), one would expect children of high socioeconomic group parents to have more ability than children of low socioeconomic group parents;” in other words, according to the architect behind this billion dollar standardized testing company, public schools are now a Darwinian model of survival of the fittest—or perhaps the richest (“No Child Left Behind” n.d.).

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

After the implementation of No Child Left Behind, state standards (and standardized assessments aligned to these standards) became the norm to meet accountability measures of this legislation. However, there was a common argument, that states could not compare data to one another because each state’s expectations were different from one another; hence came the impetus for the Common Core Standards, which is a national set of standards that are measured using a uniform framework for all states who adopted them (“In the States,” 2012). Like standardized testing, there exists a great deal of controversy surrounding the national implementation of these national standards. In 2009 the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the organization “Achieve,” all led by the organization “Student Achievement Partners” and the head of the College Board Organization (Chen and Coleman, 2005). In that year there were few educators in this group, there were many testing representatives present (Ravitch, as cited in Strauss, 2014). Because the U.S. Department of Education is legally banned from controlling any curriculum in local public schools, it was prohibited from subsidizing the creation of these standards. As a result, the Gates Foundation has funded the cause with nearly $200 million to jump start the implementation of these standards. It is important to note that these standards are considered a starting point and will continue to be revised as new research arises, and students cannot currently opt out of this curriculum if they live in a state that has adopted the standards (“NC Common Core Explained: Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.).

Wiggins (1991) asserted that a school has standards when the school’s standards depend on multiple factors for their validity and meaningfulness; the school’s standards must also be aligned to the school curriculum and gives teachers the opportunity for deep, meaningful learning through fewer and more rigorous standards, helping our nation become more globally competitive (Conley, 2011; Wagner, 2013). Furthermore, by sharing a national curriculum, it will eliminate issues of gaps appearing for students if they are moved from a state with a very high level of standards to a state with everything that can be counted counts, and the sharing of ideas and resources on a national level while still allowing for local flexibility and interpretation of the standards (Phillips & Wong, 2010). Several professional education associations also support these new curriculum standards, the most noteworthy being the nonprofit organization of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). This association, founded in 1943, is a membership-based group of educational professionals and experts, and it was one of the final educational organizations to formally endorse the Common Core standards. The ASCD only endorsed these standards after a thorough year-long review of the standards development and implementation of this curriculum, and it stressed the importance of teacher and administrator input into these standards, along with continuous professional development, to make these standards a success.

Perhaps it is because of improper support and lack of appropriate professional development that opposition, both from political and educational realms, is beginning to grow in response to the implementation of Common Core standards. While a proponent of the common core himself, Conley warned that, if executed poorly, these standards could result in “accountability on steroids, stunting meaningful school improvement nationwide” (2011, para. 2). Furthermore, Diane Ravitch, noted educational historian, expressed that our schools are now comprised of “guinea pigs trying everything that has been a largely untested curriculum” (Ravitch, 2013). Ravitch also relayed her fear that issuing national curriculum could lead to a test-based meritocracy by ranking and rating every student, teacher, and school in the country in an annual report card (“States Oppose the Standards,” 2014). Ravitch himself, Conley warned that, if executed poorly, these standards could result in “accountability on steroids, stunting meaningful school improvement nationwide” (2011, para. 2). Furthermore, Diane Ravitch, noted educational historian, expressed that our schools are now comprised of “guinea pigs trying everything that has been a largely untested curriculum” (Ravitch, 2013). Ravitch also relayed her fear that issuing national curriculum could lead to a test-based meritocracy by ranking and rating every student, teacher, and school in the country in an annual report card (“States Oppose the Standards,” 2014).
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There are perspectives in favor of standardized assessments, in general, standardized tests are inclusive and non-discriminatory because everyone has to take them, regardless of race, gender, or ability. These tests can provide an indication of students’ ability on a variety of topics while identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses, and they can also be a useful tool for assessing the schools themselves (Brown & Hattie, 2012, p. 289). Moreover, high advocates of standardized assessments argue that these tests make certain that schools and faculty members are held accountable to taxpayers for their instruction and that many parents and teachers approve of these tests (Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?, n.d.).

Concerns regarding standardized testing include too much emphasis upon scores, student testing anxiety, “teaching to the test,” cheating concerns, and socioeconomic and cultural bias (Brown & Hattie, 2012; Olson, 1999). Part of the concern regarding standardized testing comes from concern that there is too much emphasis placed upon them, leading to concerns about student testing anxiety, “teaching to the test,” skewed test results, and possible cheating concerns (Olson, 1999; Brown & Hattie, 2012, p. 289). Because these tests are considered “high-stakes,” poor student performance can lead to negative consequences for students and teachers alike; to protect both the test-takers and test administrators, “standardization of psychological safety to make effective use of, so too do teachers and school leaders need protection from negative consequences” (Brown & Hattie, 2012, p. 289). Some argue that the more important these tests become “in terms of being the basis for promoting or retaining students, for funding or closing down schools—the more that anxiety is likely to rise and… “and that if test anxiety ultimately “drives good teachers and principals out of the profession” (Kohn, 2000, p. 3; Renuzi, 2013, p. 1). Because the stakes of these tests are so high, test anxiety is a common ailment amongst students across the nation; the Stanford-9 standardized exam, for example, even comes with instructions as to what actions the test administrator must to take if a student vomits on a test booklet (Ohanian, 2002). Stories like this add to the public sentiment that these tests are inflicting serious harm (Kohn, 2000). However, as Pawloski stated that poverty is more influential to academic performance than even gestational exposure to cocaine (2014). In every state in the nation the economically disadvantaged subgroup never outperforms other non-labeled students regardless of the grade level or subject area, supporting that the variable with the strongest correlation to academic achievement is socioeconomic status; correlations between SES and student achievement frequently range from .100 to .800 (Tienken, 2010; White, 1982). In a meta-analysis of research regarding socioeconomic status and achievement, Noe found that the correlation between these two variables increased throughout the levels of schooling, climaxing in the middle school, and plateauing at the high school level (2005). This is also the case for additional study on achievement and SES at the middle level is crucial as “the [cognitive] effects of wealth [are] indirect and must accrue over time” (Willingham, 2012, p. 34). Accountability measures were put into place to ensure a decline in achievement gaps between low income and higher income students; No Child Left Behind legislated a goal of 100 percent of students, regardless of identity-of-ethnicity, or at proficiency levels by 2014. However, a 2008 study forecast “nearly 100% failure” of California schools to meet these accountability measures; the study cited that the reason for this projected failure would be due to the poor results from limited English proficiency students and high poverty students “Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?, n.d.). Unfortunately, NAEP data also supports this prediction; the National Association for Educational Progress reported in 2005 that nearly 50% of all immigrant, minority, and high poverty children were not meeting basic standards in high school and that in the nation’s largest cities, more than 30% of the lowest-income students landed in the lowest percentile rankings on standardized assessments in reading and mathematics (Renuzi, 2013). Even the founder of the Educational Testing Service, Henry Chauncey, has been quoted as saying “if there is anything in heredity (such as tall parents having tall children), one would expect children of high socioeconomic group parents to have more ability than children of low socioeconomic group parents” in “other words, according to the architect behind this billion-dollar standardized testing company, public schools are now a Darwinian model of survival of the fittest—or perhaps the richest ("No Child Left Behind" n.d.).

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on Innovation: Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America,’ 2011). In Tienken’s (2011) research on the growing body of evidence supporting the Common Core standards, he discovered a lack of empirical evidence supporting these standards; this assertion was based on the 2010 Benchmarking for Success report, which was also written by the same group that created the standards. Of the 138 references used in this report, Tienken asserted that many of them are repetitive sources and that only four could be considered truly empirical studies directly related to national standards and student achievement (2011). The standards themselves are also a source for dispute. College professors who have reviewed the standards at length argue that they are overly worded and leave much open to interpretation, much like this English Language Arts standard: ‘...the process becomes more difficult before true, lasting change takes place. Several researchers believe that the Common Core standards implementation should continue through this “dip” but that some changes are necessary to make it succeed. These researchers believe that rather than as a tool for high-stakes testing, it should be used as a “low-stakes” tool for curriculum development and professional development. Furthermore, these researchers argue that Common Core standards and assessments should be subjected to field testing and revisions before using these standards for high-stakes assessments (Mathis, 2010).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This nonexperimental quantitative study with secondary data analysis was designed to determine how socioeconomic status and student achievement on high-stakes assessments are related. The study was focused on middle grades students in North Carolina public schools during the 2012 and 2013 end-of-grade state assessments. Comparisons were made between the 2012 assessments (pre-Common Core implementation) and 2013 assessments (post-Common Core implementation).

In this study the level of socioeconomic status of the students was an academic year, and the grade of the Common Core test. Even though the independent variables, and the dependent variable is academic achievement as indicated by proficiency levels (percentage of students labeled as proficient) on standardized tests for middle grades students?

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference between 2012 and 2013 academic achievement scores on reading standardized tests for middle grades students?

M, = 107.61, SD = 34.83, t(32), p < .001. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because test scores were significantly higher in 2012 than in 2013. The standardized effect size index, d, was 3.26, which is a large effect. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two years’ scores was 45.86 to 47.56. A plot comparing the means of these scores is shown in Figure 13.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference between 2012 and 2013 academic achievement scores on mathematics standardized tests for middle grades students?

A paired-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether a significant difference exists between academic achievement proficiency scores on mathematics standardized tests for middle grades students between 2012 and 2013. Mathematics achievement scores were significantly lower in 2013 than in 2012. The results indicated that the mean proficiency score (M = 81.54, SD = 10.07) was significantly higher in 2012 than in 2013 (M = 34.83, SD = 15.74), t(1088) = 8.17, p < .001. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because test scores were significantly higher in 2012 than in 2013. The standardized effect size index, d, was 3.26, which is a large effect. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the two years’ scores was 45.86 to 47.56. A plot comparing the means of these scores is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 1

Means of mathematics scores in middle grades students compared by academic year.
A paired-samples $t$ test was conducted to evaluate whether a significant difference exists between academic achievement proficiency scores on reading standardized tests for middle grades students between 2012 and 2013. Reading achievement scores were significantly lower in 2013 than in 2012. The results indicated that the mean proficiency score ($M = 70.40, SD = 12.65$) was significantly greater in 2012 than in 2013 ($M = 43.06, SD = 14.09), $t(1088) = 76.06, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because test scores were significantly higher in 2012 than in 2013. The standardized effect size index, $d$, was 2.30, which is a large effect. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference between the 2 years’ scores was 26.63 to 28.04. A plot comparing the means of these scores is shown in Figure 14.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference between proficiency levels in both reading and mathematics standardized tests when compared by the schools’ economic levels in 2012 and 2013 for middle grades students?

HO1a: There is no significant difference between proficiency levels in both reading and mathematics standardized tests when compared by the schools’ economic levels in 2012 and 2013 or other socioeconomic levels for middle grades students.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether significant differences existed between students’ proficiency levels in reading and mathematics standardized tests when compared by the schools’ economic levels for middle grades students on the 2012 North Carolina state report card. The factor variable, the socioeconomic descriptor of the student population, included four levels: 1%–40% economically disadvantaged, 41%–60% economically disadvantaged, 61%–80% economically disadvantaged, and 81%–100% economically disadvantaged. The dependent variable was the percentage of economically disadvantaged students passing both the reading and mathematics end of grade test for 2012 in each of these SES levels. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3,359) = 57.99, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The strength of the relationship between economically disadvantaged proficiency levels and the four socioeconomic levels as assessed by $h^2$ was medium (.33).

Because the overall $F$ test was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means of the four groups. A Dunnett C procedure was selected for the multiple comparisons because equal variances were not assumed. There were significant differences between the means of students passing both the reading and math standardized assessments at every socioeconomic level. Schools with more students on free or reduced cost lunch scored significantly lower than schools with fewer students on free or reduced cost lunch. Schools with 1%–40% of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch scored significantly higher than schools with 41%–60% of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch, and the 41%–60% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 61%–80% of the student population receiving free or reduced cost lunch. Likewise, schools in the 61%–80% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 81%–100% of the student population receiving free or reduced cost lunch. The circles on the box plots denote outliers that are farther than 1.5 interquartile ranges (and closer than 3 interquartile ranges). The numbers next to the circles and star indicate the case number of the outlier. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the means and standard deviations for the four socioeconomic levels, are reported in Table 13, and a box plot comparing the means between the groups is reported in Figure 15.

HO1b: There is no significant difference between proficiency levels in both reading and mathematics standardized tests when compared by the schools’ economic levels in 2013 for middle grades students.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether significant differences existed between students’ proficiency levels on reading and mathematics standardized tests when compared by the schools’ economic levels for all middle grades students on the 2013 North Carolina state report card. The factor variable, the socioeconomic descriptor of the student population, included four levels: 1%–40% economically disadvantaged, 41%–60% economically disadvantaged, 61%–80% economically disadvantaged, and 81%–100% economically disadvantaged. The dependent variable was the percentage of economically disadvantaged students passing both the reading and mathematics end of grade test for 2013 in each of these SES levels. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3,359) = 50.78, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The strength of the relationship between economically disadvantaged proficiency levels and the four socioeconomic levels as assessed by $h^2$ was medium (.30).

Because the overall $F$ test was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means of the three groups. A Dunnett C procedure was selected for the multiple comparisons because equal variances were not assumed. There were significant differences between the means of economically disadvantaged students passing both the reading and math standardized assessments at every socioeconomic level. Schools with more students on free/reduced cost lunch scored significantly lower than schools with fewer students on free or reduced cost lunch. Schools with 1%–40% of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch scored significantly higher than schools with 41%–60% of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch, and the 41%–60% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 81%–100% of the student population receiving free or reduced cost lunch. Likewise, schools in the 61%–80% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 41%–60% of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch, and the 41%–60% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 61%–80% of the student population receiving free or reduced cost lunch. Likewise, schools in the 61%–80% socioeconomic bracket scored significantly higher than schools with 81%–100% of the student population receiving free or reduced cost lunch. The circles on the box plots denote outliers that are farther than 1.5 interquartile ranges (and closer than 3 interquartile ranges), and the stars on the box plots denote outliers that are farther than 3 interquartile ranges. The numbers next to the circles and stars indicate the case number of the outlier. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the means and standard deviations for the four socioeconomic levels, are reported in Table 14, and a box plot comparing the means between the groups is reported in Figure 16.
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As a result, this school went from nearly being taken over by the state department of education to an example of the rest of high poverty schools, striving to follow. Educators and policymakers must stop being tolerant and accepting of the link socioeconomic status and student achievement by referring to it as a truth of our system (Wiggins, 2012).

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, schools cannot effectively improve student academic achievement without dealing with one of the most critical issues in our schools today: student poverty. Just as a doctor cannot treat a patient’s symptoms without attacking the infection, teachers cannot improve academic achievement in students with addressing the underlying economic issues that affect the student and family. Schools in high poverty areas already have difficulty in hiring and retaining high quality teachers due to the inherent difficulty in these positions and cycle of low expectations and poor performance (Porter, 2013). When the deck is already stacked against high poverty schools and students, high quality instruction is paramount.

Some researchers suggest introducing socioeconomic integration by busing, much like what was implemented during the Civil Rights movement, to bring in better teachers and enhance parent engagement. A 2010 meta-analysis suggested that students in socioeconomically integrated schools performed better in mathematics achievement testing than nonintegrated schools (2013). It is important to note that because poverty is an issue that exists outside the control of our schools, “...no policy improves socioeconomic status” directly...good policy is based on an understanding of causal relationships between family background and children outcomes, as well as cost-effectiveness” (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005, p. 35). However, these strategies and schools can positively impact our high poverty students to address issues that stem from a low socioeconomic level:

- Provide access to high quality, experienced teachers;
- Provide access to school resources (both at school and at home);
- Maintain high expectations and high quality curricula;
- Provide parent education and assistance from social services;
- Facilitate community services provided to families through the school (i.e., free dental clinics, parent education workshops, food pantry for families, etc.);
- Focus on early education programs (like Pre-Kindergarten/Head Start programs) and interventions for all-at-risk students;
- Provide specialized training and high quality professional development for faculty and staff in best practices for high poverty students;
- Focus on the school becoming a community of learners;
- Improve parent involvement;
- Improve relationships between school and community;
- Increase school funding from local, state, and federal agencies;
- Offer summer enrichment and summer school programs; and
- Maintain for small school and class size (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Jensen, 2009; Muis, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2009; Reardon, 2013; Sirin, 2005).

While this list is not all-inclusive, it provides a beneficial starting point for schools that have a large population of high poverty students. However, improving academic achievement in the high poverty school is often an uphill battle. Sadly, the founder of the Educational Testing Service, Henry Chauncey, has been quoted as saying “if there is anything in heredity (such as tall parents having tall children), one would expect children of high socioeconomic group parents to have more ability than children of low socioeconomic group parents” (“No Child Left Behind?,” n.d.). In other words, according to the architect behind a multi-billion dollar standardized testing company, public schools are now a Darwinian model of survival of the fittest—or perhaps the richest. If this is the mantra behind standardized testing and accountability in our country, our schools, and therefore our nation’s future, are in dire straits.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

The Common Core movement, along with what we know as educational research on the effects of poverty on student achievement, has a significant impact on how we are preparing our future teachers as undergraduate stu-


Reardon, S. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. Educational Leadership, (70) 8, 10-16.


